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The Guardian

EUROPE

G2 with today's TV

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Twelve hostages freed after Yemen gunfight □ Islamic militants blamed

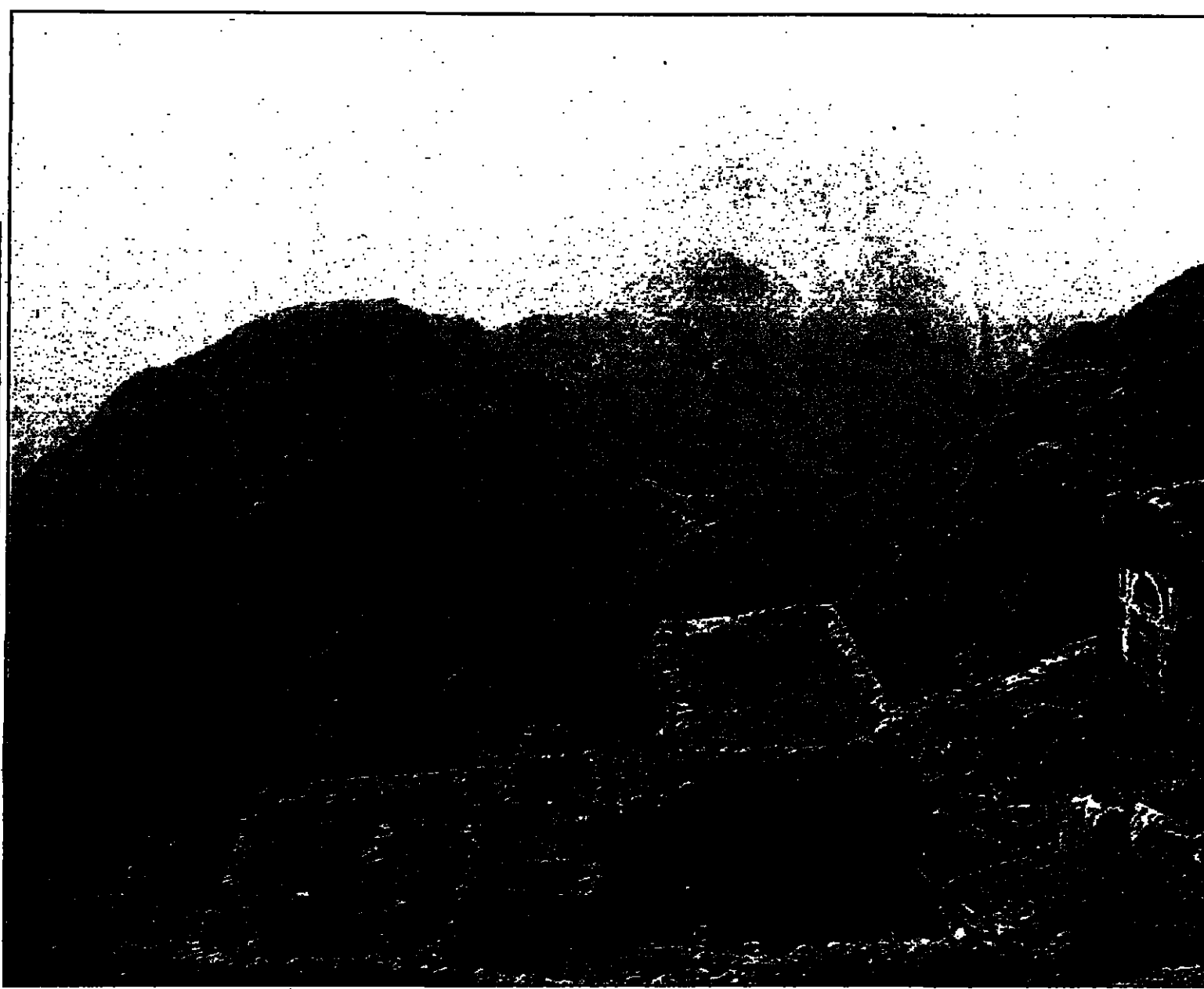
Kidnap terror ends in death

Three Britons die
as tourist rescue
ends in shoot-out

Brian Whitaker

THREE British tourists and one Australian were shot dead yesterday at their kidnappers' hide-out in Yemen when security forces stormed the site in a disastrous end to the country's worst hostage crisis. Twelve other captives, including nine Britons, were freed but two were injured. Two kidnappers also died. The names of the tourists were not released last night as next-of-kin were still being informed. According to Yemeni security sources, the kidnappers had links with Islamic extremists. A spokesman for the Yemeni embassy in London claimed the casualties were murdered by the kidnappers before the troops moved in. "I think that when the security forces got to the place, the kidnappers started to kill some of the hostages," the spokesman said. "When the security forces intervened, there were clashes and some of the other hostages were released. Four kidnappers were arrested." The Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, said last night that three Britons and an Australian were killed. "I am deeply shocked at the news of the casualties suffered by the group of tourists abducted yesterday in Yemen," he said. "I am very sorry to confirm that three of the British tourists have been killed, and others injured." In light of the incident, "British nationals should not attempt to travel to Yemen unless their business is essential, and any British visitors still there should leave". An official at the British embassy in the capital, Sana'a, said: "Our priority is to help the hostages now they have been released." She was

unable to give information about their condition. Seven of the uninjured hostages were last night at the Moevenpick Hotel in Aden. David Pearce, deputy head of mission in Sana'a, said: "They are in a state of severe shock. They are uninjured but very tired, very stunned and in need of a good meal, a good rest and someone to talk to. They have been through an awful experience." The 12 Britons, including six women, were among 16 holidaymakers seized when the kidnappers, armed with Kalashnikovs and bazookas, held up their five-vehicle convoy on the road from Habban to Aden on Monday. Reports said shots were fired at the scene but no one was hurt and the lead vehicle escaped to raise the alarm. The hostages were taken to a hideout at al-Wadeia, 280 miles south of the capital, where more than 200 government troops later surrounded them. Initially there were high hopes that the kidnapping would end peacefully — as has always happened. The governor of Abyan province, Ahmad Ali Mohsen, spoke to leaders of the al-Fadil tribe, to which the kidnappers were believed to belong. Soon afterwards, however, Yemeni security sources began to hint that this was not the usual tribal kidnapping, with demands for roads, electricity, schools and basic local facilities. They suggested that the kidnappers were Islamic extremists seeking the release of their leader, Salih al-Hadi al-Alawi, who was arrested with another man two weeks ago in a crackdown on Islamic vigilantes. Little information has emerged about how the tragedy happened. In the north-eastern province of Marib, where four German tourists are being held, a similar siege has gone on for three weeks, with reports of some firing



The rugged Yemeni terrain provides the kidnappers with a natural fortress and makes a rescue by force very difficult

and numerous arrests, but no harm to the hostages. It is unclear who fired first in yesterday's shoot-out. The official Yemeni version is that the kidnappers killed some of the hostages, prompting the troops to begin their rescue. The Yemeni government also maintains that these were not the usual tribal bandits who treat their captives well; they were "politically motivated",

probably linked to Islamic militants. Conventional tribal kidnappings are fairly rare in southern Yemen, and Islamic extremists, some of them supporters of Osama bin Laden, are known to be active in Abyan, where the kidnapping took place. Another possibility is that the kidnapping went disastrously wrong when someone

on one side or other panicked. It was the largest kidnapping Yemen has known and came only a few months after the death penalty for was introduced for hostage-taking. Kidnapping has been on the increase for several years, probably because growing numbers of tourists and foreign workers provide more opportunities. The 12 Britons were in a

group of tourists travelling with a British company, Explore Worldwide. The British ambassador, Victor Henderson, said the road where they were snatched was not especially dangerous. "Our travel advice, which the Foreign Office issues, refers to a random risk of kidnapping anywhere in Yemen. Putting this in the context of some 60,000 tourists

a year, a couple of dozen people have been kidnapped every year for the last four or five years," he said.

The freed hostages 'are in a state of severe shock. They are very tired, very stunned and in need of a good meal, a good rest and someone to talk to. They have been through an awful experience'

David Pearce, deputy head of British mission

EXPLORE
worldwide

Blunkett clampdown on holidays in term time

John Carvel
Education Editor

EDUKATION ministers are negotiating with the travel industry over the changes in the pricing structure of package holidays to remove the incentive for families to take their children out of school during term time. David Blunkett, the Education and Employment Secretary, is worried that his drive to raise standards is being jeopardised by increasing absenteeism, as middle-class parents take advantage of low season prices to fit more than one annual holiday into their busy working lives. "We are engaged in discussions with the Association of British Travel Agents. One option is to lessen the financial incentives prompting parents to take holidays in term time," a departmental spokesman said. The Government secured an agreement last year with the main carriers to Bangla-

desh after complaints that Bangladeshi children were being taken out of school in England to take advantage of term-time flight discounts. Bangladesh Airlines and Emirates Airlines agreed a flat-rate pricing structure to eliminate the incentive to absenteeism. The Department for Education and Employment said it hoped Abta would persuade its members to extend this policy to the wider holiday market, but it was too soon to forecast the impact on prices. Another option was to place a reminder to parents in travel brochures about the damage that could be done to their children's education if they were taken out of school for a holiday. The initiative emerged yesterday when the National Association of Head Teachers responded to a government request for information to persuade the travel industry to address the problem. David Hart, the general secretary, said: "Not only are the numbers of parents taking

their children on holiday during term time rising, but parents are increasingly ignoring schools' requests to observe policies which do not authorise such holidays. "One secondary school recorded over 2,000 sessions lost to holidays in term time in 1997/8." Two many pupils were absent for parts of July, September and October when the tour operators offered holiday packages more cheaply than during the school summer vacation. Classes also emptied in the weeks immediately before and after Christmas and Easter holidays and around the February and summer half-term breaks. "The present law permits pupils to have up to 10 days authorised absence per school year, but parents increasingly are taking advantage by treating this as a right," said Mr Hart. "It is patently wrong that parents cannot, or will not, turn to page 2, column 5

Gates opens up, virtually

Julian Borger
in Washington

WITH his wunderkind gloss tarnishing rapidly under the pressure of an anti-trust trial and a string of hostile biographies, Bill Gates has embarked on an image-building blitz donating millions to good causes, waxing lyrical on fatherhood and generally doing spontaneous, regular-guy, things. But when you're the richest man in the world, with controlling tendencies, even moments of joyful spontaneity sometimes have to be carefully scripted. It is not cheap. Take Mr Gates's autumn break this year, when he took a few dozen friends by rail across Montana, Wyoming and Colorado. When the party stopped at a restaurant, a couple of rowdy strangers joined in uninvited and proceeded to poke fun at the computer geek. "Hey, aren't you that computer guy Steve Jobs?" they asked Mr Gates playfully, according to yesterday's



Bill Gates: hired actors for impromptu entertainment

Washington Post, deliberately confusing the Microsoft chairman with his former rival, the founder of Apple Computers. The invited guests laughed, nervously, at the impertinence of it all. It was only yesterday revealed that the chappies were actually actors, hired to provide some impromptu entertainment. Mr Gates even gave them strict instructions on what to say and do. It was the most bizarre episode in a carefully-managed trip. Mr Gates's guests, including America's second richest man — Warren Buffett — were transported across the Rockies in a private train, triggering complaints from rail travellers whose journeys were held up to allow the express to thunder by. At each stop, advance teams adjusted lighting, music and air-conditioning as he moves around the house, while a touch-sensitive pad allows his two-year-old daughter, Jennifer, to conjure up any song or film scene within 30 seconds.

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Britain's leading
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for a five year ban on
genetically modified food while
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Russia's financial crisis
claimed a famous scalp
yesterday when former
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In **G2 EUROPE** today: Why David Hare fully clothed does more for me than Nicole Kidman in the nude. Michael Billington's year.

+ Francis Wheen, Britain's most irreverent columnist + Society: the eco-year + Plus European weather, TV and radio

How last Soviet leader lost his roubles

James Meek in Moscow

RUSSIA'S financial crisis claimed its most famous scalp yesterday when Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader of the Soviet Union, announced that he was flat broke.

The man honoured throughout the western world for his role in freeing Eastern Europe from communism found honour was without profit in his own country when the Russian bank in which he had stashed his \$50,000 savings went bust with the collapse of the rouble.

"All my money is gone," he told Germany's Bunte magazine in an interview published yesterday.

Mr Gorbachev, bundled out of office by President Boris Yeltsin and the Russian parliament seven years ago as the USSR disintegrated, never reconciled himself to the lack of gratitude from his countrymen for his role in freeing Eastern Europe from totalitarian communism and introducing democracy, the free market and McDonalds hamburgers to Russia.

But he was always thought to have banded his personal financial affairs shrewdly, exploiting his status abroad to win hefty book advances, lecture fees and lucrative personal appearances.

He is known to have a large country house outside Moscow, but lives and acts without the gross ostentation of the small class of super-rich New Russians whose emergence he unwittingly enabled.

"You know, I'm not really as rich as many in



Mikhail Gorbachev, with his wife Raisa, at a book signing in a Moscow store yesterday

PHOTOGRAPH: OLEG NOZDREV

the west think," he told Bunte. "The new rich here in Moscow often spend more in one night than I earn in a whole year." Some of his money was invested in his own charitable foundation. Thanks to the collapse of the bank, he said, staff at the foundation had not been paid for several months.

The former Soviet president is hoping to restore his

fortunes by writing a new book in time to mark the tenth anniversary of German reunification in October.

There were signs that all was not well with the Gorbachev finances earlier this year when he appeared in a US television commercial for Pizza Hut, playing himself in an argument between Russian pizza-eaters about the virtues of con-

sumer capitalism. Shortly afterwards, Pizza Hut, alarmed by the collapse of the rouble, pulled out of Moscow.

The shock waves from the August crash are still shaking the foundations of Russia's new elite. Yesterday the Russian interior minister, Sergei Stepashin, said that theft or blunders within the central bank up to August could have cost

the country billions of dollars.

Since the crash, the bank has been under investigation by a group from the interior ministry, the federal security service and the general prosecutor's office. A parallel probe is under way by the country's main state auditors and a western accountancy firm is about to be chosen to audit the bank's books for 1998.

Second blow for Robinson 'successor'

David Hencke
Westminster Correspondent

Geoffrey Hoon, the minister of state in the Lord Chancellor's Department, has been rejected for the second time as Paymaster General to replace Geoffrey Robinson.

He lost his first chance in the last reshuffle in July when the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, successfully stopped Tony Blair from removing Mr Robinson. Mr Hoon, who was due to replace him, had to stand down but was given a pay rise and promoted to minister of state to continue in his present job.

This time his appointment has been blocked by the Lord Chancellor, Lord Irvine, who says he needs Mr Hoon to pilot the Access to Justice Bill and the Lords reform measures through the Commons.

Mr Blair had in principle already decided to appoint him and sent round an internal circular anticipating the move. But then Lord Irvine intervened.

He is understood to have told the Prime Minister he could not risk putting Lords reform in inexperienced hands since the passing of the bill will be essential to this year's government programme.

The decision not to move Mr Hoon has left a vacuum in the Treasury with Mr Blair going on holiday without deciding who should take the job.

This has led to speculation in Whitehall that the post may not be filled at all — particularly as it would add to the Government's salary bill because Mr Robinson did not take his salary.



Geoffrey Hoon: rejected twice as Paymaster General

Insiders point to a precedent under the previous Tory government when the Paymaster General's post was in the Cabinet Office, not the Treasury. Then the post was held by David Willetts and he resigned in the wake of the cash for questions scandal.

Some sources suggest that Peter Kilfoyle, the parliamentary under-secretary at the Cabinet Office, should take the role. He already does part of the Paymaster General's work as he is jointly responsible with him for the present review into government procurement policy.

This would present a political problem for both Mr Brown and Mr Blair since it would be interpreted as a further snub for the Chancellor and be seen as enhancing the already strengthened role of Jack Cunningham, the Cabinet "enforcer". Whitehall sources think this is why Mr Blair has decided to sleep on it while on holiday.

Mr Blair has also failed to

appoint a successor to John Denham, promoted to health minister, as junior minister responsible for pensions reform. This is a detailed job at the heart of welfare reforms dear to New Labour and Mr Blair is thought to want to promote a bright backbencher to take over.

Meanwhile support for a reform of the policing of the ministerial code of conduct grew yesterday following Peter Mandelson's resignation over accepting a £370,000 home loan from Mr Robinson.

Elizabeth Filkin, the new Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, welcomed the Committee on Standards in Public Life looking at whether she should take over the job from the Cabinet Secretary.

She said: "It may be that it would be a better arrangement to have investigations — when they are needed — to cover both MPs and what they do, rather than to have investigations in the Commons and indeed, what they do if they happen to be in ministerial positions."

She added: "If it were done, my office is set up to carry out investigations and we would be able to do so but that it is a long way down the road."

Clive Sokey, chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party, also welcomed her carrying out inquiries — but thought her report should go to the Prime Minister to decide what action should be taken.

David Winnick, Labour MP for Walsall North, called for MPs' salaries from outside work to be made public and for the release of annual tax returns of all 659 members.

Polly Toynbee, page 8; Letters, page 9

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Heads scorn cheap breaks

continued from page 1
and time for family holidays within the existing 14-week envelope of time outside school terms. The travel industry's promotion of cheap family holidays in term time is a major contributory factor," he said.

Mr Hart was sceptical about the Government's chances of persuading the travel industry to change discounting policies that were designed to fill planes and hotels during the off season. He called for changes in the law to make it illegal for parents to withdraw their children from school for this reason. Although it was unlikely they would be prosecuted, the threat of a legal sanction would help heads enforce school policy.

The association said the reasons given for term-time holidays included:
□ more children holidaying with each of their divorced parents;
□ more parents working long hours seven days a week and fitting in holidays when they can;
□ ethnic minority families visiting the Indian sub-continent and Caribbean from November to March for family reasons;
□ firms closing for a two-week company holiday during term time.

An Abta spokesman said it could not direct its members on prices. "Without legislation, it would be virtually impossible to stop firms charging less during term time. This is a commercial market and I don't see how that can change," he said.

A spokeswoman for the travel agent Lunn Poly said the vast majority of parents organised family holidays during the school summer holiday.

"We are prepared to look into this, but in the end it is down to parents to make sensible decisions on behalf of their children. That's one of the civil liberties that we still have," she said.

New Year storm warning

Fourth night of gales and heavy rain as two more victims found

Sarah Hall

BRITAIN suffered a fourth night of gales and heavy rain yesterday as forecasters predicted further storms could herald the New Year.

The warning came as the bodies of two more victims of the Christmas storms were discovered, bringing the death toll to eight.

The body of Graham Franklin, a 28-year-old carpenter from Tombridge, Kent, was found on a beach two miles from Brighton, East Sussex, where he was washed out to sea on Boxing Day when taking a swim. In Ireland, a man's body was recovered from a tributary of the River Suir, near Waterford.

In Devon and Cornwall, Torquay and Penzance seafronts were closed as waves lashed over the roads. West of Penzance, a two-lane road between Catchall and St Buryan was shut after a section collapsed into a river below and a bridge was swept away. While in Loughmoe, south Devon, a 13,000-tonne tanker ran aground before righting itself.

In Holyrood, Northern Ireland — which has seen its most tempestuous gales — residents of a block of flats, whose roof was blown off on Boxing Day, were told they might not return home for six months.

A total of 25,000 homes in the Irish Republic remained blacked-out for a fourth night running, while 1,000 Scottish households were also without electricity.

Their plight led Jimmy Hood, Labour MP for Clyde-dale, to accuse ScottishPower of "incompetence" in failing to reconstruct supplies earlier and call for safer practices. A ScottishPower spokesman said: "It was a huge weather event with 100,000 off supply. No system in the world can withstand 110mph winds."

As climbers and hikers were warned of the high risk of avalanches today in the Cairngorms and Inverness-shire, streets in Glasgow centre remained closed after a steep collapse.

Some Scottish rail services were disrupted, and ferries from Stranraer to Belfast, from Dublin to north Wales, were cancelled.

The bad weather looks set to continue. While the winds of up to 110mph seen on Boxing Day are not expected, forecasters predict storms could lash eastern Ireland and the west coast of Britain on New Year's Day.

Tattered and tired Pirates

Review

Tim Ashley

The Pirates Of Penzance
Queens Theatre, London

NEW D'Oyly Carte is a bit like New Labour: it's changed, you might say; it's not what it was. Like many, I was brought up on the old company, whose visits to Liverpool and Manchester in the late sixties provided me with my first insight into the potential of music theatre at a time when the big opera companies rarely toured.

The new company, formed in 1988, has had a permanent struggle for survival in the face of the usual artistic indifference from successive governments, and the strain is regrettably showing.

Thanks to Raymond Gubbay the company has returned to Shaftesbury Avenue — but where Gilbert and Sullivan's Pirates should have rolled back into the West End, they've arrived tattered, tired and lacking in glamour. The whole enterprise has "under-

written" and "shoestring" written all over it.

Stuart Saunders's production plays the piece straight, and roughly in period, avoiding those trendy text updates. The issues subjected to Gilbert's scrutiny — the moral worth of a hereditary peerage, the use of money to buy social privilege, a police force which hinders the law rather than helping it — remain screamingly relevant and you don't need to fiddle with the lyrics.

The problems lie in a lack of slickness and panache. Roger Kirk's stylised pasticheboard sets and gaudy costumes just about pass muster. The big routines, often played with a lack of conviction, won't solve a serious problem when you're not sure whether the out-of-synch policemen's march is deliberate or not.

Golden opportunities are ignored: the contrast between Christopher Saunders's small-but-perfectly-formed Frederic and Nicholas Todorovich's tall, lanky Pirate King could have proved both telling and funny, though Moundar rarely exploits it.

A handful of individual performances just about save it. Richard Stuart, a natural suc-

cessor to the great John Reed, patters astoundingly and is gleefully funny as Major General Stanley. There's a delicious Ruth — part Marie Lloyd, part Mollie Sugden — from Jill Pert.

Saunders's Frederic is cute, nerdy and lyrical, Anna-Clare Monk's Mabel has a nice line in high-flying coloratura.

Elsewhere, however, things come adrift. Todorovich seems ill at ease as the Pirate King, struggles with a vocal line which lies painfully high for him, isn't always happy buckling a swash, and should camp it up more.

Gareth Jones's Sergeant is fun, but his voice isn't sonorous enough. The small chorus is fine, though the singing-in-the-pit are dispiriting. Budgetary constraints have forced the company to re-write the score for a band of nine instrumentalists. They play well enough, but every one of Sullivan's parodies loses its clout.

If you're sending up mid-period Verdi (and Pirates lays shamelessly into Trovatore and Traviata), then you've got to have the means to make the score sound like mid-period Verdi, which this just doesn't.

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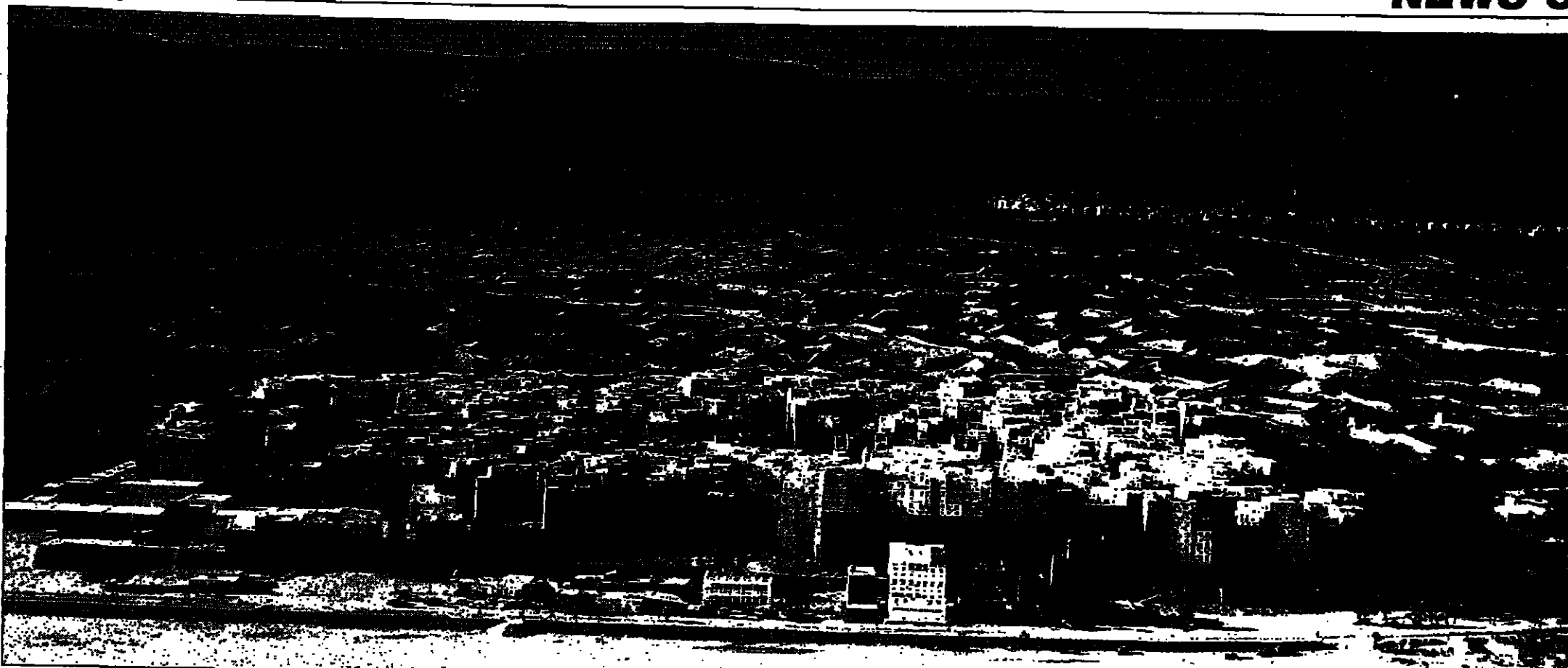
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'If you were to ask me what's the greater risk, to be mugged in central London or to be kidnapped in Yemen, I would have to say the former'

Victor Henderson, Britain's ambassador to Yemen, on BBC Radio yesterday before the sudden shoot-out



The historic Yemeni town of Wadi Hadramaut, Shibam, which was restored with Unesco funds as part of an attempt to raise the country's tourism profile, badly hit by yesterday's killings PHOTOGRAPH TONY STONE

Hostage to fortune and Yemeni guns

Security: The state holds little sway in much of the country

Brian Whitaker

THE HOSTAGE tragedy in Yemen highlights the often tenuous control of the government over its people. President Ali Abdullah Salih might give the appearance of a strongman, having been in power since 1978 — longer than Thatcher, Major and Blair put together — but he has stayed there less by the iron fist than by tactical alliances with the country's quarrelsome factions. Among them are the tribes, especially influential in the north, who have their own traditional laws and recognise government authority only when it suits them. Often, they have their own militias, too. For several months, tribal fighters in Marib province have been confronting the security forces with some success. Since June they have blown at least 19 holes in the pipeline on which Yemen depends for 40 per cent of its oil revenue.

A complicating factor during the early 1990s was that Yemen also became a haven for the "Arab Afghans", as they became known — Muslim volunteers from various countries who had fought against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

In Yemen, under the name "Jihad", the Arab Afghans formed a loose alliance with various southern Yemenis who harboured grievances against the Marxists who ruled southern Yemen until 1990 and who later formed a power-sharing government with President Salih's supporters in the north.

Much of the remotest part of Yemen is lawless in the sense that it conducts its affairs beyond the purview of the state and its legislation. That does not mean, however, that behaviour in these areas is unregulated; citizens are expected to meet the standards set by convention, tribal law and Islam. The state has learned from painful experience that intervention brings risks, and tends to keep interference to a minimum.

Individual Yemenis, too, tend not to look to the state for protection; by age-old custom, personal security is a matter for the individual and his household. This is reflected in the traditional architecture, where each house is also a fortress: the ground floor has one small entrance and no windows; upper floors are reached by a narrow staircase, which always winds to the right as one goes up, and gives defending swordsmen an advantage over intruders.

The tradition of self-defence, of the scale, is represented by the *jambiyah*, a broad, curved knife worn as a token of manhood at the front and held in place by a brightly-coloured belt. According to one Yemeni doctor, the most common knife injuries are stomach wounds inflicted by wives seizing their husbands' *jambiyas* during an argument.

Further up the scale is the pistol or Kalashnikov carried by those involved in blood feuds, or for protection when travelling through remote or unfamiliar places. By tradition, guns are also fired into the air at Yemeni weddings. Needless to say, accidental deaths are common. Important or wealthy figures routinely employ armed guards at the gates of their

houses, or to accompany them on journeys. In the case of an important sheikh, this may extend to a private militia, which can be supplemented by reserves from the tribe when needed. Within the tribal area such forces fulfil to some extent the law and order role that elsewhere would be assumed by the state. In a few cases, wealthy

individuals also operate their own prisons. According to the interior ministry there are about 50 million privately-owned firearms in Yemen — more than three per person. At a famous market outside Sana'a, one can purchase anything up to a rocket launcher or an armoured car. People carry guns because

others carry them, and because the authorities do not or cannot provide adequate protection. The inadequacy of law enforcement is due partly to the lack of means and partly to the lack of inclination. Yemen has less than one police station for every 100,000 people. As in many poor countries, the police are

badly paid and thus less resistant to bribery. The ineffectiveness of the police has three main effects. One is the difficulty of making arrests, particularly in the more serious cases where the police are outnumbered and out-gunned. The second is that the military tends to become involved at the first sign of serious trouble — this can

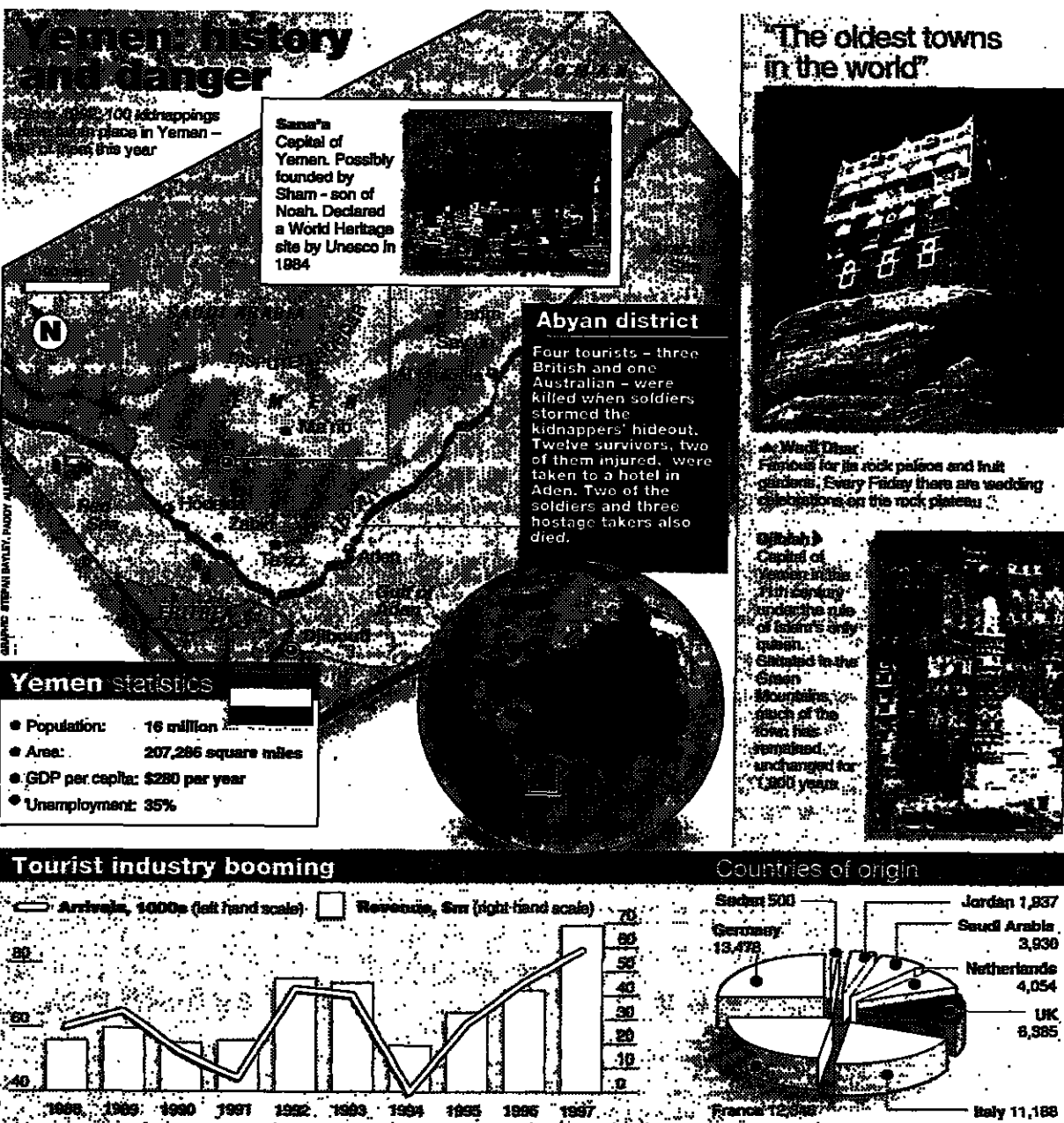
often make a bad situation worse. The third effect is that the law tends not to be enforced where there is substantial resistance to it. In some cases the law is seen as interference with people's right to carry on traditional activities such as smuggling, while others involve people whose status is such they feel the law need not apply to them.

The suggestion yesterday from Yemeni government sources was that Jihad elements, rather than tribal bandits, were behind the kidnapping of the 16 tourists — which may help to explain the unusually violent outcome. Although there are strong suspicions that Jihad has links with Osama bin Laden, one of its key figures in Yemen was Tariq al-Fadli, a sheikh from a prominent southern Yemeni family which had been dispossessed under the Marxists. Sheikh Tariq gathered around himself a number of Afghan war veterans, members of his own tribe and religious opponents of the Marxists. He was said, at one point, to be seeking 10,000 "hajj" to help him "save Muslims in Bosnia, wage war on the authorities and bring down the regime, which he considered intimate with unbelievers."

Sheikh Tariq and his "Afghans" were implicated in the Aden hotel bombings of 1992. They were eventually besieged at his home in the rugged Maragasha mountains, 12 miles from the coast of Abyan. Despite the army's Third Armoured Brigade being sent to arrest the sheikh, the forces could not reach his well-protected stronghold.

Sheikh Tariq escaped and resurfaced in Sana'a. Although reported to the public prosecutor, he was never tried. During the war of 1994 he fought on the president's side and later emerged as the leading sheikh of the south. For several years the authorities have waged a less than vigorous campaign against Jihad and the "Afghans". On one hand, under pressure from western governments, they want to be seen to be doing their bit to combat terrorism. But on the other, they lack the resources — and in the view of some observers, the will — to do so effectively.

Britain publicly supported the retaliatory cruise missile strikes at a chemicals factory in Sudan and camps in Afghanistan run by bin Laden.



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Britons in the line of fire

Ian Black
Diplomatic Editor

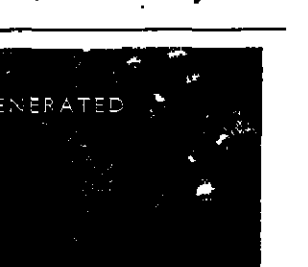
TOO little is known about the Yemen kidnapping to determine whether it marks the beginning of a significant new threat to Britons or other westerners abroad. Though initial signs suggested it was a local incident rooted in Yemen's tribal political culture, there were later hints from Yemen security sources that the hostage takers belonged to a group of Islamic extremists.

There is no doubt that Tony Blair's close support for United States policies in the Arab and Muslim worlds, particularly over Iraq, has exposed Britain to the dangers of a volatile region.

Americans are very high-profile and Brits are identified with them even more after Operation Desert Fox, one security analyst commented. "Feelings are running high at the moment."

Reports that the Yemeni group, Islamic Jihad — composed of former mujahideen who had fought the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s — were involved fit a pattern of militancy associated with Osama Bin Laden, a wealthy Saudi expatriate and the FBI's most wanted international terrorist. And so would suggestions of a link to the Egyptian Jihad group, accused of attempting to assassinate President Hosni Mubarak as well as the mass murder of western tourists, including Britons, at Luxor a year ago.

Security at British embassies will certainly have been heightened, especially in the light of last summer's attacks on the US missions in Kenya and Tanzania, which killed more than 220 people. Britain publicly supported the retaliatory cruise missile strikes at a chemicals factory in Sudan and camps in Afghanistan run by bin Laden.



Osama bin Laden: pattern of Islamic militancy

Tour companies axe trips as Foreign Office rethinks advice

Holiday Alert: Adventurers may find popular destination soon listed as a no-go country

Rory Carroll

HUNDREDS of British holidaymakers in Yemen were last night considering whether to return home as travel agents prepared to axe package tours to the region where four hostages were killed.

Explore Worldwide, the holiday company which the kidnapped Britons were travelling with, put two more trips planned for February 1999 on hold.

Rival companies Bales, Exodus and Yasmin Tours said they would only go ahead with tours in March if the Foreign Office said it was safe. The Foreign Office said it

was considering adding Yemen to its list of no-go countries. At present, it advises that there is a kidnapping threat but does not urge people to stay away.

Such a warning would be heeded, and jeopardise Yemen's blossoming tourist industry, said Sean Tipton, of the Association of British Travel Agents.

Last year 84,000 tourists visited Yemen, including 5,385 Britons. Explore Worldwide, of Aldershot, Hampshire, has taken about 220 people to Yemen this year in more than a dozen trips.

Norman Godman, a Labour member of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, said people should be discouraged from visiting countries like Yemen. "There's a lack of control by the authorities then in my view people should be stopped from going to such hotspots. This terrible case might shake the travel industry out of its state of lethargy."

Explore Worldwide, which has operated for 17 years, pitched its holidays at fit, adventurous individuals keen to see unspoilt scenery. Tours range from eight days to six weeks and are carried out in small informal groups, averaging 16 people.

Its brochure says: "Small groups are environmentally more friendly and their effect is less disruptive; they promote a better understanding and awareness amongst people of different cultural lifestyles and backgrounds."

Sue Ockwell, a company spokeswoman, said the kidnapped tourists were on a circular tour of the Yemen looking at sites dating back to the 8th Century BC, meeting local people and looking at sites which relate to the Queen of Sheba.

Yemen, an impoverished nation bordering Saudi Arabia, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, boasts historic temples, engravings and statues in addition to the near-deserted beaches of the Red Sea and spectacular mountain scenery.

Before travelling, the tourists were given copies of the Foreign Office travel advice which says that when kidnappings of foreign tourists do occur, the captives are usually well treated. Walking is an integral part of the trip and travel may also

be by coach or local bus, train, expedition vehicle, minibus, boat, native canoe, raft or light plane. Sometimes a camel, a donkey or even an elephant may be used.

Much planning has to go into organising the trips, the majority of which are led by Explore Worldwide's field staff. In some cases, local English-speakers lead the tours, in line with Foreign Office advice.

All the leaders are selected for their personality, general travel experience and enthusiasm, according to Explore Worldwide.

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RAILTRACK

The heart of the railway

Brother and sister meet again after 80 years apart

Simon Cooper

A BROTHER and sister who were separated after being orphaned in England during the first world war have been reunited in Canada more than 80 years later.

Daisy Bance, 85, from Southampton, and her brother Albert, 84, were put in different children's homes after their father was killed in the trenches. They never saw each other again.

When Mr Bance was 14, he was shipped to Canada to start a new life as one of the so-called Home Children, while Miss Bance remained in Britain.

But on Monday, the pair met again during a reunion at Montreal airport.

Hugging her brother, Miss Bance said: "I don't want to let you go anymore."

Mr Bance replied: "Here I am, I'm your brother. I've been waiting a lifetime." Last night Miss Bance added: "It's wonderful. It's come from nowhere. I had given up hope of finding Albert again."

She described the moment their years of separation ended: "There were all these people standing there and there was Albert with a lovely bouquet of flowers. I just put my arms around him and started crying."

The reunion was arranged by Mr Bance's children and grandchildren, who spent several years trying to trace his sister.

After finding her birth certificate in the Family Records Office in London, they began tracing all the Bances in the south of England. They searched the Internet, and sent letters to possible relatives until she was found.



Albert Bance embraces his sister Daisy in Montreal 80 years after they were parted as war orphans. PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID SCARWY

The brother and sister swapped faxes and in October enjoyed their first telephone call. They met after one of Mr Bance's five children won a radio competition in Canada to bring a family together for Christmas.

The reunion trip is Miss Bance's first trip abroad. She says she made the 3,000-mile journey because "I thought it would be a disappointment to Albert if I did not come".

After the siblings' father

was killed in France in the dying months of the war, their mother took them from their home in Putney, south-west London, and placed Albert, Daisy and another sister, Frances, in children's homes. She is thought to have died shortly afterwards.

Miss Bance, who has never married, lived in nine orphanages throughout England before entering service as a live-in help to a series of wealthy families.

She retired to Southampton, where she now lives.

After arriving in Canada in 1929, Mr Bance worked on a farm in the Eastern Townships. He later married, joined the police force and then served as a fire chief before retiring. His wife, Evelyn, died three years ago and he now lives in Waterloo, Quebec.

Mr Bance's daughter, Joan Alexander, said her father would spend the week getting to know his sister. The family is planning a dinner for tomorrow.

Mrs Alexander said: "It's the most wonderful thing. It's almost overwhelming. My father was so nervous because he was only four when they were separated. The family had been collecting information about the two sisters for years. We think Frances has died, but we were delighted when we finally managed to contact Daisy."

Pressure group claims survey will shock ministers

Rail fares on track for rises up to 23pc

Helen Carter

RAIL passengers are facing a miserable new year with fares set to soar by as much as 23 per cent, according to a survey published by Save Our Railways.

The pressure group compared fares on some of the most popular routes — from London to Birmingham, Manchester, Edinburgh, Exeter and Glasgow — and found that most are to rise well above the rate of inflation.

Fares on key commuter routes are controlled by the Rail Franchise Director and some will go up by less than the rate of inflation. But 50 per cent of "uncontrolled" fares will be increased, the survey shows.

According to the findings, the largest increase will be the 23.5 per cent for a single first-class ticket on the Virgin service from London to Birmingham, which at present costs £42.50. From January 4, it will cost £52.50.

A standard single ticket on

Midland Mainline trains to Manchester from the capital will increase by 19.6 per cent, from £56 to £67, while a super-saver return will cost an extra 3.8 per cent — up from £39.50 to £41.

For travellers to Exeter, a super-saver return will cost £40 instead of £37, an increase of 8.1 per cent. A Great North Eastern saver return to Edinburgh will cost an extra 6.8 per cent — up from £75.50 to £80.60.

"Our findings will horrify rail passengers and will shock government ministers," said Save Our Railways national secretary, Keith Bill.

"We think it is outrageous that fares are increasing on average at double — or in some cases seven times — the rate of inflation. It is appalling that one of the most popular routes, between London and Birmingham, is going up by such a colossal amount."

"What makes it worse is that there are now many more restrictions on when super-savers and savers can be used. Passengers are finding they are forced to buy stand-

dard singles or returns — at much higher rates."

He called on the Government to review the rail fare structure, as the increases would not encourage people to use trains instead of cars.

But a spokesman for the Association of Train Operating Companies said: "This was a highly selective sample from 40 million possible ticket combinations. Our independent research shows that unregulated fares nationally are only going up by an average 4.5 per cent."

"Average rail fares will continue to fall as they have done over the last three years."

A spokeswoman for Great Western said that cheap day return fares between London and Exeter would be increasing by only 3.89 per cent — from £36 to £37.40.

"On average fares will go up by 2.8 per cent and cheap day returns will go up by about 4 per cent," she said.

A spokesman for Great North Eastern claimed Save Our Railways had a "bee in its bonnet" over fares.

Family's home bombed in sectarian attack

Hardline loyalists probably to blame for blast at bungalow

John Mullin
Ireland Correspondent

RUC detectives believe hardline loyalists yesterday targeted a Catholic family for a blast bomb attack simply because they had recently moved into a predominantly Protestant estate in Armagh.

Kate O'Connor and her three children, aged 11, eight and five, had a narrow escape when their bungalow was attacked early yesterday. Her husband, Michael, a taxi-driver, was at work.

Mrs O'Connor was watching television in the lounge of the bungalow when the device exploded, shattering the lounge window. The roof was also damaged.

The children were asleep in their bedrooms. Mr O'Connor, who returned home soon after the attack, took the family away with him. They are staying with relatives. He described those responsible as "sick cowards".

Mr O'Connor said: "According to the police, my wife is the luckiest woman in Armagh. She was sitting beside the Christmas tree right by the window when the bomb exploded. The children are in bad shape. They are pretty shocked."

Police, who confirmed they were treating the attack as sectarian, evacuated the area. There was no immediate claim of responsibility. Two groups, closely linked, which provide a focus for hardline loyalist dissent after the Loyalist Volunteer Force's announcement of a ceasefire, could be involved. The Red Hand Defenders used a blast

bomb when it killed RUC constable Frankie O'Reilly in Portadown, Co Armagh, three months ago.

The newly formed Orange Volunteers attacked a bar in Antrim earlier this month with a similar device. It said it was targeting an IRA commander.

But sectarian attacks remain common in Northern Ireland, and usually no recognised paramilitary group is responsible.

One neighbour of the O'Connors said: "Mrs O'Connor was a very lucky woman. She was showered with glass, but extraordinarily wasn't injured. When I spoke to her, she was in a very shocked state."

Robert Turner, Ulster Unionist mayor of Armagh, said that the scene of the explosion was "a mixed area and it is quite an upmarket estate. I hope people would be sensible enough not to allow this to provoke any escalation of violence."



The Guardian's Christmas appeal offers readers the chance to donate to up to eight charities. Today David Gough reports on WaterAid, which is enabling thousands in Ethiopia to free their lives from day-long treks to distant streams

Lives freed from illness by water on tap

N EARLY 2,000ft down a track leading to the village of Sama Senbet in the central highlands of Ethiopia, a solitary figure labours upwards with a large clay pot on her back full of water from the stream below.

Eme Nega is 35, but hardship has already scarred her with the features of old age. Every day during the nine-month dry season she leaves her village at dawn to fetch water. "It takes me six hours to go to the stream and back, and sometimes I have to go twice a day," she said.

The pot weighs more than 50lbs when full, and years of carrying it has left her with a twisted back and wells on her chest where its rope straps dig in.

In a country where water is scarce, life for Eme and thousands like her is consumed by the search for water, whose absence dramatically reduces the prospects of development.

In recognition of that, the British charity WaterAid began working with Ethiopian organisations in 1991 to devise water provision schemes for areas of the country worst affected by shortages.

Employing a philosophy of community empowerment, and relying almost entirely on the skills and knowledge of local staff, WaterAid has provided funds for seven projects serving some 285,000 people.

Completed in 1994, the Hitosa project is one of the more ambitious supply schemes that WaterAid, in conjunction with its local partner, WaterAction, has carried out. The project, involving 75 miles of piping carrying water by gravity from a mountain spring, cost only £10 per beneficiary, but has dramatically improved the lives of those whom it serves.

Until the project was completed, Ayelu Nagash spent five hours every day walking



Hitosa women waiting to fill their pots with water from a pond before WaterAid put it on tap. PHOTOGRAPH: CAROLINE PENN

to and from the nearest water source. "I had to make do with whatever I could carry, which was about 25 litres. Now I have an unlimited supply five minutes' walk from my home," she said.

Nagash now also has enough water to grow vegetables on the small plot of land next to her house, and says that the time she previously spent collecting water can now be turned to spinning, which supplements the family income. "Since they built this tap my life is so much better," said Nagash, just one of 60,000 people living in the 26 villages and three towns to have benefited from the scheme.

Kelemusa Wolde has lived for 45 years in Itaya, at the centre of the Hitosa project, and says the town has changed beyond recognition since water arrived there. "The local economy is really picking up," said Wolde.

"New businesses are coming up all the time and we even have a petrol station now."

A local businessman said that Itaya's new-found prosperity was entirely due to the supply of water, as "people now have time to dedicate to things other than collecting water".

Regist Adunya is 15, and now attends a local school for the first time. "I used to spend eight hours a day fetching water and was always tired. I never had time to go to school before," said Adunya.

"Our developmental philosophy is based on community empowerment," said Girma Mengistu, director of WaterAction. "We ask each household to contribute 25 toward the project and try to involve the community from the start." The communities also provide labour for trench digging and pipe laying.

Eighty per cent of the funding for the Hitosa project

came from WaterAid, 3 per cent from the Ethiopian government, and the remainder from the communities that benefit from it. Once the projects are completed, a nominal charge is levied for the water, the proceeds of which are sufficient to maintain the scheme. "Community involvement is the key to the success of our projects," said Mengistu.

In addition to the supply of water, WaterAid has also initiated health and sanitation educational programmes to complement the changes that the water supply has brought. "The provision of water alone is not enough," said Takelle Kassa, a programme engineer with WaterAid. "We have to change behaviour to combat disease and poor sanitation, and so we are touring the region giving lectures on the construction of pit latrines and basic hygiene."

Infant mortality in the

The charity

- About a quarter of the world's population — some 1.4 billion people — do not have access to clean water.
- Every hour more than 600 people die because their water is contaminated, inadequate or non-existent.
- WaterAid co-operates with communities and aid

agencies to install simple water systems in developing countries.

- Just £1 pays for enough cement to build a latrine; £10 buys a suction pump to bring water from a reservoir; £30 pays one month's salary for a hygiene educator; and £470 will pay for the installation of a public water point which can be used by up to 100 families.

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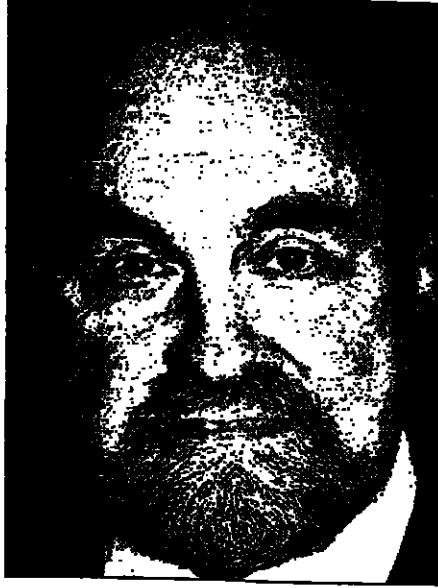
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150 من الدين



Chefs (clockwise from top left) Nico Ladenis, Raymond Blanc and Sean Hill lead a line-up of Britain's top restaurateurs opposing the use of genetically modified crops before field testing

Restaurants press for ban on genetic crops

Paul Brown
Environment Correspondent

THE country's most prestigious restaurants are calling on the Government to impose a five year ban on growing and selling genetically modified food while further research on its impact is carried out.

Celebrated chefs such as Nico Ladenis, of Chez Nico at Ninety Park Lane, London, and Raymond Blanc, of Le Manoir aux Quat Saisons in Great Milton, Oxfordshire, have joined a campaign calling for the ban.

Chef Nico, which has three Michelin stars and scores 10 out of 10 for cooking from the 1999 Good Food Guide, leads a list of the best restaurants, which regard genetically modified food with distaste.

Only 23 restaurants in Britain rate 9 out of 10 or more in the 1999 guide for their "quality of cooking". Nineteen of these back the Friends of the Earth campaign for a five year ban on genetically modified food, two failed to answer and only two said they did not support a ban.

Among the 10 out of 10s is the Altharrie Inn in Ullapool, Highland region, which can be approached only by boat across Loch Broom, and where the chef Gunn Eriksson cooks without mains electricity.

Shaun Hill, chef and proprietor at Merchant House in Ludlow, Shropshire, said: "Like many restaurateurs I am very concerned about the introduction of genetically modified food. There are just too many question marks hanging over the new technology. I care about food quality which is why I avoid using GM ingredients. It's about time the Government learned from the mistakes of the past and stopped messing about with our food."

The restaurants are asking for the five year ban because the results of field trials on genetically modified crops will not be known before then. The trials start this year to measure the spread of herbicide-resistant crops into the environment, for example to see whether they inter-breed with weed species or "normal" plants or reduce insect and bird populations.

Susan Fischer, of Fischer's Baslow Hall, in Baslow, Derbyshire, said: "We use only fresh meat and vegetables here. Our clients expect it, and rely on us to provide it. They and we are suspicious of genetically modified food. We do not know what it does to us and the risks there might be to future generations."

"We support the ban until there are a lot more tests to know what is safe. If these products are allowed, we want proper labelling, not in the small print at the back, but in big letters so that everyone knows exactly what they are getting and can make a choice."

Whips school 'marginal' MPs for political afterlife

Nicholas Watt
Political Correspondent

LABOUR may be riding high in the polls, but the Government's ever-attentive team of whips is taking steps to prepare MPs in marginal seats for life beyond Westminster if they are defeated at the next election.

The whips - normally cast as bruising disciplinarians - are transforming themselves into sensitive career guidance officers.

The office is to offer MPs deemed "at risk" time off to maintain their links with the outside world.

MPs with qualifications in law or accountancy will be encouraged to catch up with developments in their area, while less skilled backbenchers will be offered training to improve their computer skills.

The whips are concerned that MPs in marginal seats - five will defend majorities of less than 1,000 - should not suffer the same fate as many Tories who have struggled to find jobs since the election.

One MP said yesterday: "MPs with really small majorities are simply not expected to win because we never expect to win so many seats."

The subject is sensitive because any mention of career guidance for MPs indicates that Labour is not confident of repeating last year's landslide.

Philip Sawford, who will defend a majority of 189 in Fettering, insisted yesterday he will retain his seat. "At least I have a job for at least the next two years, unlike millions of other people," he added.

Clare Ward, aged 26, who won the Tory safe seat of Watford, is taking no chances and recently qualified as a solicitor. However, she insists she is not taking out insurance against losing her seat. "It was just a formality because I passed all the exams before I was elected," she said.

More calls on priests to deliver us from evil

Madeleine Bunting on the clergy having to cope with an increasing demand for exorcism

CHRISTIAN clergy are increasingly being called upon to cast out ghosts and poltergeists and even to rid people of evil spirits because of a growing fascination with the supernatural.

Experiments with the occult including ouija boards, tarot cards and astrology are being blamed along with the popularity of television programmes such as X-Files and Carol Vorderman's factual-based programme on the paranormal for leaving people confused and vulnerable.

Officially, the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church refuse to comment on the phenomenon although they admit that every diocese has dedicated staff experienced in dealing with exorcism, deliverance and the paranormal.

Church spokespeople insist that cases are rare, but the Rev Peter Irwin-Clark, an evangelical Anglican priest in Brighton and former barrister, is coping with a growing workload.

"There's probably been an enormous increase in the last 30 years of cases as a result of the acceptability of the paranormal in popular culture. Probably a week doesn't go by without me praying for someone to have some sort of spiritual bondage removed."

Mr Irwin-Clark believes most of his colleagues have to deal with three or four cases involving the occult every year. He dismisses criticism of such work claiming that his experiences square with the frequent references in the New Testament to devil possession and Christ's commandment to his followers to cast out evil spirits. He points out that baptism is a form of deliverance when parents agree to "reject Satan and all his works" on behalf of their child.

"I have not seen full-scale demonic possession but I have seen demonic affliction when an area of a person's personality has been gripped by an evil spirit or a fallen angel."

There are considerable personal dangers to this work, says Mr Irwin-Clark.

Earlier this year, I couldn't work out why I didn't feel any joy in my ministry, there was a lot weighing on me. Someone discerned an attacking spirit - it was probably associated with a Satanist group putting a curse on me. The work is tricky.



Tom Willis, a Church of England exorcist in the York diocese

He believes the church is less embarrassed about the subject than it used to be, and points to the New Testament as a vindication of his work. He takes a very practical view of his 30-year ministry of casting out ghosts, poltergeists, evil spirits from pubs, hotels, warehouses, even a aerodrome.

"About one in 10 people see a ghost in their lifetime. The police sometimes refer a case to us. People see apparitions, objects moving around, their experience being tapped on their shoulder, doors opening or strange smells. I've seen objects disappearing and reappearing in a neighbouring room. It's not clear to me whether this is an offshoot of the human mind - some sort of stress leaking out - or it is something using human energy."

"I've had the experience of poltergeists reading my mind. It can be quite frightening. Once there were a couple of mediums who wanted to give up because they sensed evil - it was quite a struggle with a lot of screaming and shouting."

Doctors urge NHS scoring system for hospital waiting lists

David Brindle, Social Services Correspondent

DOCTORS are today calling for a radical new approach to hospital waiting lists which would "severely score" to dictate how soon they should be treated. The idea is backed in principle by patients' groups, but organisations representing older people are warning against any system that gave less priority to those past retirement age.

Doctors' leaders themselves acknowledge that a scoring system - the details of which have not been worked out - could bring into the open the wider issue of health care rationing. They say some treatments might "never reach a high enough priority to get funded on the NHS."

The call for a fresh approach to waiting lists comes in a discussion document from the British Medical Association, following a resolution passed at the association's annual meeting last summer. That resolution expressed regret at the Government's emphasis on cutting waiting list numbers. It warned that the approach threatened to distort clinical priorities.

Peter Hawker, who chairs the BMA's consultants' committee, said today's document proposed to shift the focus from the numbers of people waiting to their individual needs.

Saddam Hussein seeks to exploit political gains from US-British air strikes, reports David Hirst in Beirut

Iraq incites fresh attack

THE United States released videotape yesterday of its clash with Iraqi forces in the northern Iraq no-fly zone as Baghdad warned that it would continue to shoot at any allied planes in its air space.

US defence and administration spokesmen insisted that the flights would resume in the north as soon as possible and that Washington was determined to enforce both the northern and southern no-fly zones. Flights continued as usual in the southern zone, they said.

The videotape showed the exchange of fire between Iraqi forces and US fighter jets in the most hostile clash since Operation Desert Fox ended nine days ago.

"Splash, splash," said one voice on the tape after plumes of smoke could be seen billowing from what the Pentagon said was an Iraqi target.

"Nice shot," another voice said. Before leaving the area, a third voice can be heard saying: "Six bombs hit the target area."

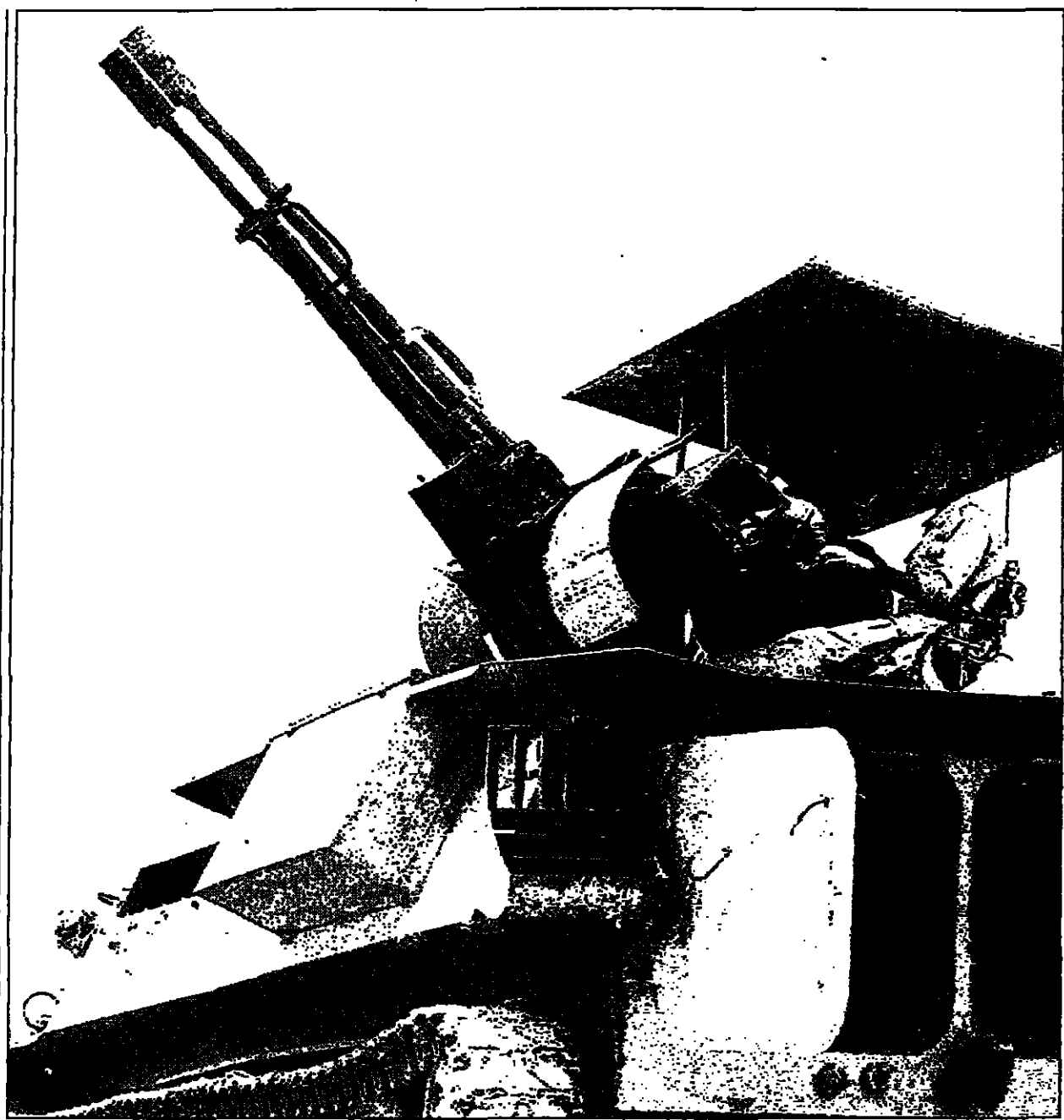
Iraq claimed that it shot down one of the planes.

A US defence department spokesman said bad weather had forced the British and US aircraft which monitor the northern no-fly zone to cancel flights on Tuesday. "But they will continue to fly missions and patrol the northern no-fly zone, as the president said yesterday," he added.

The latest clash is the outcome of an offensive by Saddam Hussein to exploit the gains, mainly political and diplomatic, he reckons he has made at the expense of the United States and Britain.

Arab observers listing those gains include the international and Arab backlash against the operation and the split it has caused in the United Nations Security Council, as well as its apparent failure to seriously undermine President Saddam's regime.

They say the operation has damaged the United Nations Special Commission (Unscm) and left the United States and Britain without a clear strategy for their next step. As it mounts new challenges, Iraq is making it fairly



Iraqi soldiers man an anti-aircraft gun yesterday, as Baghdad claimed it had downed a US plane. PHOTOGRAPH: KAREN SAWH

plain that it is ready to goad the US and Britain into yet another onslaught.

The Baghdad daily newspaper Babel, owned by President Saddam's son Uday, said: "The military action which they wave as a means of psycholog-

ical terror cannot be more than what our people have already seen."

The central issue remains weapons inspections by Unscm. Even before the British-American bombardment was over, the Iraqi vice-

president, Taha Ramadan, said: "If they [the US and Britain] believe that the weapons [of mass destruction] are somewhere, they should have destroyed them all."

The Baghdad media has been insisting that UN weapons inspectors will never return.

"To say that Unscm still exists," al-Iraq newspaper said, "is like chasing a sick mirage."

Iraq has always denounced the no-fly zones as infringe-

ments of its sovereignty. Mr Ramadan said: "This Iraq air space, from south to north, is one on which we shall permit no encroachment."

On Monday Iraq said four of its soldiers had been killed when US planes attacked an air defence position in the north. The attack was confirmed by Washington.

Iraq has also been threatening to end the UN food-for-oil programme, whose current six-month term ends in May.

On Sunday the minister of trade, Muhammad Mehdi Saleh, said Iraq rejected a further extension of the deal, but a day later he appeared to backtrack, saying that the 400 UN workers involved in the scheme would stay as long as they were needed.

On the wider diplomatic front, President Saddam has crossed a new threshold of pugnacity.

His officials and media continue to single out the US and Britain as the principal villains, they do not spare Iraq's "friends" from condemnation.

This may reflect his confidence that, amid the general confusion over Iraq, he should strike while the iron is hot.

The Babel newspaper said bluntly that Iraq could no longer put much trust in Russia, "which has so often in the past asked Iraq to make difficult concessions for nothing in return."

It went on: "China contents itself with issuing communiques, as for France, its position is so vacillating that we don't know whether it is for us or against us."

It is much the same with the Arab world, where President Saddam is seeking to profit from public sympathy for the Iraqi people and to shame Arab leaders in the wake of the British-American attack.

Iraq wants an Arab summit conference to be held, focusing solely on the lifting of sanctions.

The Baghdad press yesterday denounced the Arab League's decision to postpone a foreign ministers' meeting to discuss such a summit. This, said al-Jumhuriyah, was "an attempt to absorb the popular anger that has exploded in the Arab nation".

Car burning baffles Strasbourg

Paul Webster in Paris

SIX HUNDRED extra police have been sent to Strasbourg, in eastern France, in an attempt to stop what has become an annual seasonal car-burning festival.

Since Christmas about 40 vehicles, including a tram, have been set on fire by gangs of young people determined to push vandalism beyond record levels.

Last year the Socialist-run city, which wants to become Europe's capital, recorded 570 car fires, most during summer and winter school holidays.

With the Christmas flare-up, the number of gutted vehicles has reached nearly 700 this year, and the authorities are preparing for a repeat of last year's exceptionally hot New Year's Eve, when 136 vehicles were set ablaze.

Although the city on the German border has a bourgeois image as the seat of the European Parliament and the Council of Europe, 40 per cent of the population lives in poor, high-rise areas, heavily populated by north African and Turkish immigrants.

But sociologists believe the car burning has no direct connection with high unemployment or racist tension.

Fatah Boujelida, president of a youth association in the poor suburb of Cronenbourg, said the vandalism was committed by children aged 14 to 16 who were not considered rebellious.

They can be very nice during the day but as soon as night falls they set light to vehicles for no apparent motive," the youth leader said, adding that most of the cars were parked in poor suburbs.

"They want to set a record so they'll be spoken about. Some see it as a sporting occasion."

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Comment

Diary
Matthew
Norman

WHEN the Diary Annual Awards Panel met recently in our usual salon priverie at the Savoy, it was a typically rumbustious lunch. Regulars Paul Johnson and Michael Winner were present, and we were joined by debutants Sir Bernard Ingham and Rizla Rosie Boycott. Once Rosie's personal servant, a man lying at her feet whom she addressed imperiously as "Blackhurst", had rolled her a strongly-scented cigarette, we began. But it was only once the roast swan had been cleared away, that we moved to our deliberations. Here, then, are the results of the Diary jury.

THE Alastair Campbell Etiquette Medal. There was, inevitably, strong competition in this category. Sir Bernard proposed Mr Tony Blair for walking out of the Commons before Frank Field's resignation speech, while Rosie nominated Michael Winner for winning a life ban from Le Gavroche for insulting staff. Unpleasantness ensued until a compromise candidate was found. Telegraph proprietor Conrad Black wins the award for sequestering a female feature writer to make up the numbers at a dinner party - and then, when a male guest pulled out at the last minute, approaching her during drinks and asking her to leave immediately. By the tradesman's entrance.

PARLIAMENTARIAN of the Year. Paul Johnson took a special interest in this category since he, he explained, working on one of his famously accurate tomes about a legendary parliamentarian. This has the working title "Young Winston: How Churchill Won the Battle of Marathon" ("Shouldn't that be the Battle of Sluiskens?" asked Rosie, exhibiting already an odd craving for chocolate). Paul argued persuasively for eventual winner Peter Truscott, a Labour Euro MP who dazed Brussels when he asked: "Would the European Commission please inform me of the amount of funding Hertfordshire has received from the Flare and Facis funds in 1994-97?" In response the Commission gently pointed out that Herts had received nothing, since the funds were set up to help former Warsaw Pact countries transform themselves into market economies.

THE Yorkshire Water Golden Standpipe for PR Damage Limitation. Sir Bernard, while doodling a baffling but impressive detailed astrological diagram on his napkin, proposed Richard Branson. In a bid to assuage customers' fury, Virginia North West produced a leaflet offering free refills of tea and coffee. When a colleague's son claimed his complimentary refill, the steward asked "Where's your tea bag?" "Er, I'm afraid I threw it away," "Sorry," said the steward, "You can have the refill if you keep your original teabag."

SCOOP of the Year. With typical modesty, Rosie Boycott nominated her own Express, for the story of Paul Johnson's very naughty relationship with Gloria Stewart. The prize, however, went to the Daily Telegraph for its "Jonathan Aitken did it all for M16" exclusive. "This," said Michael, "was painstaking investigative journalism at its finest." Indeed it was. When a Telegraph reporter faxed a copy to the Guardian editor for his comments, he was especially impressed by the single line - in computer note form - which read: "This comes directly from Aitken but cannot be sourced to him."

WITH the eruption of Sir Bernard Ingham's volcanic fury at the matchstick house being built by his neighbour Michael Winner - unless Michael could prove he had planning permission for the upper storey, screamed Bernard, he was going to call the council - we decided at this point to take a 30 minute time-out. The decisions taken when we reconvened will feature here tomorrow.



The grand projects must go ahead, with - or without - Gordon Brown

Polly Toynbee



SITTING on his beach in the Seychelles, gazing out at the far horizon, the Prime Minister might well contemplate the loneliness of life at the top. A leader has no friends. He has servants, flatterers, advisers - good and bad - but no intimates. Absolute power over the careers of all around him dictates absolute friendlessness. The shock of Mandelson's head-long plunge proves it. How long ago May Day 1997 suddenly seems, when the whole world was briefly in love with New Labour. Now there is a sourness in the air. Then even the right-wing press heaped adulation upon him but no longer, as fair-weather friends grow more savage by the day - the old wolves gnawing through their temporary sheep's clothing. In the beginning everything seemed possible - such a majority so much good will. Leadership of the willingly led hasn't been difficult. Suddenly everything important looks almost out of reach. On the horizon, Blair, unlike most leaders, can see clearly where he wants to go, a good man for the long strategy, but he seems to lack the tactical nous he needs to get there. His grand projects are all still far off, with obstacles and enemies looming on more fronts, the economy uncertain, employment turning down. This is the year Blair's mettle will be tested for the first time. Before anything else, he has to deal decisively with the faultline running through his leadership - the Brown problem. It has to be repaired, welded or the crack will stand far worse strains still to come - or else Brown has to go. As a leader credited with tyrannical authority over his cowed troops in parliament, Blair has allowed this meaningless rift to rock

the Government to its foundations, ending with Mandelson's head falling into Brown's basket. It is about nothing, it signifies nothing, only empty rivalries of no political or ideological content, now discussed despairingly and openly by senior Ministers. Alas it is no fragment of Tory newspaper imagination and it has to stop now before it risks wrecking Blair's key grand projects. First and most important of these is Europe. As New Year strikes, the train to Euroland departs without us yet again. Day by day we shall feel it more keenly, deservedly marginalised and patronised by Europe's leaders and no doubt teased and tormented by futuristic speeches from Oskar Lafontaine on tax harmonisation and political unity. They will not mind their tongues to suit Blair's small pace wailing of the British electorate. Why should they? The faster the train pulls away and the prouder the euro trades on world markets, the more sorely we shall feel our pathetic self-deluding and self-destructive exclusion. While the real world moves on, we are left bickering on the platform of history about increasingly illusory sovereignty and independence. This Blair knows, but still seems to have scant tactical grip on how he is to get us aboard. He has lost his strongest pro-European minister, many of the others are reluctant or apparently indifferent. The balance of enthusiasm has tilted dangerously in urgent need of passionate advocacy. For lack of it, the running is all made by the sceptics and public opinion is slipping away. On this, Blair needs to open the campaign loudly and at once, the hardest test of his qualities of leadership.

His second great project is constitutional reform. The easier parts have been done with admirable speed and little serious opposition - devolution of the nations, a mayor for London, PR for the European elections and stage-one of Lords reform. But the toughest and most vital part is yet to come - PR for Westminster and the creation of a rock solid centre-left coalition. This new political order will frighten all the old power bases, upset deepest loyalties and life-long political allegiances. It is a project with too few friends, bar Mo Mowlam and Robin Cook, and it will take phenomenal deftness and daring to make it happen, overcoming myopic party stalwarts who see no further than their own seats. The great social democratic prize PR offers could split the Tories and keep the far right out of power for ever. Blair has to persuade his party that this great project is well worth the swallowing of every local enmity and petty feud between essentially like-minded people.

YESTERDAY, Paddy Ashdown published his New Year message. It was full of the impossible contradictions of his present position. He said his constructive opposition was "exercising influence while resolutely retaining our independence". If that looks unlikely now, it will look increasingly incredible throughout this year as he fights Blair in Scotland and Wales, in local and European elections. The moment may pass if isn't seized soon. Blair has to face down that unnamed, very senior Cabinet Minister who chortled, as Mandelson fell, that they needn't worry with this Lib Dem rubbish any more. Third there is poverty: it is

the dangerous season for excellent social projects proudly launched but still to prove themselves. Now set in motion, they risk becoming dull yesterday's news - unless any of them fall miserably. Some may indeed need to be tried, again and again, while others may do great good that is hard to prove. The New Deal is transforming the lives of thousands, yet its achievement may be hidden by rising unemployment. Sensing a new vulnerability at the heart of Government, old Labour voices, of the Hattersley and Castle variety, sound a little more threatening as they bellow complaints that basic pensions haven't risen. (Nor will they, nor should they, but that won't bother the headline writers.) Winter crises in A and E are already bedecking the front pages of hostile papers, who will not tell us which taxes should rise to pay for a better NHS. But then nor will Blair. When will he dare tell electors the obvious truth that they will only get the services they vote to pay for? As on Europe, the electorate already knows the unpalatable truths he tries to keep from them. Better by far to lead them from the front. If he were a chairman addressing his shareholders, Blair would now issue a profit warning: the year ahead will be full of challenges. To which his shareholders should reply that bold and daring leadership is required of him, more than we have seen yet. Tough times require tough leaders - and this year is his testing time. If he remains timid on too many fronts, we may come to wish we had Brown after all. Deliver on the three big projects and we will know we have the right man.

The whole notion of the British Opposition has taken a holiday

Wandering William

Joan Smith



THE Leader of the Opposition has been on holiday in an absence with so little impact on most of our lives that it invites comparison with Dorothy Parker's response to the death of President Coolidge. "How could they tell?" she asked. It is tempting to think that William Hague could swan off to Montana with Pilon and his entire front bench without anyone noticing much difference. It is true that Hague's job falls, for the moment at least, in the category of "not much fun but somebody has to do it". But even when the Opposition is presented with a target as wide as a barn door, it seems reluctant to hit it.

Take last week, when the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Peter Mandelson, was still trying to tough out the revelation that he had accepted a huge loan from Geoffrey Robinson to buy a house in Notting Hill. Did the Tories, sensing an unpopular Minister was fatally wounded, go on the attack? Well, sort of. One of William Hague's brightest lieutenants, John Redwood, suggested both Ministers should make "a full statement". Sounding like an aggrieved bank manager, Redwood wrote in Wednesday's Guardian that he wanted to know the terms of the loan. "Is it secured?" he thundered, while the rest of us made rapid calculations about how long it would take Mandelson to recognise his position was untenable and resign.

JOURNALISTS were quicker off the mark to see the extent of the damage. Peter Kellner, who is widely seen as sympathetic to New Labour, asserted in the previous day's Evening Standard that Mandelson should go. Mark Seddon, editor of Tribune and definitely not regarded in Labour circles as being on-message, said the same thing on Wednesday morning's Today programme. With New and Old Labour uncharacteristically speaking with one voice, the Tories suddenly got their act together and demanded Mandelson's resignation, instead of wittering on about whether he was keeping up with his mortgage payments. By lunchtime, the beleaguered Secretary of State was gone, quickly followed by Robinson - two scalps which, you might think, the Tories should have clamoured for off their own bat.

So what is going on here? It is true that the Conservatives find themselves on shaky ground when it comes to finance. I happened to be on the Question Time panel last year when a junior Scottish Office minister, Brian Wilson, questioned about Bernice Ecclestone's £1m donation to Labour, rounded on Redwood and demanded to know when the Tories would give back the money they got from the fugitive financier, Asil Nadir. At the same time, the reluctance of the Conservative front bench to go for the jugular is perplexing. Or it would be, if it did not follow a pattern established soon after last year's general election. It has become clear, and the Mandelson episode is merely the latest evidence of it, that we are living through a period characterised by the almost total absence of an effective Parliamentary Opposition. The Tories bicker among themselves over Europe and gaze in dismay at their ineffectual leader, for all the world like a woman who is reluctantly coming to realise she has married a hopelessly unsuitable man. Either way they put up very little fight in or out of the Commons.

With any leader other than Paddy Ashdown, the Liberal Democrats might have sensed an unparalleled opportunity to establish themselves as distinct from, and more daringly radical, than Tony Blair's administration. Instead, they have joined the drone-like ranks of New Labour MPs, supporting the Government's decision two weeks ago to

The reluctance of the Conservative front bench to go for the jugular is perplexing

bomb Iraq, regardless of dubious legality and last summer's draconian anti-terror bill. Most MPs seem to be so mesmerised by Blair's charisma that they would run naked through the Chamber rather than upset him. Into this breach has stepped a handful of independent-minded MPs such as Paul Flynn and Bob Marshall-Andrews, but they are as yet regrettably few in number. That is why I suspect politicians were so slow off the mark last week when Mandelson's serious error of judgment was revealed, leaving it to columnists to state the obvious fact that he had to go. If political debate is evacuated from the usual channels, it will naturally surface elsewhere for a while, in the press or at local level. For the moment, it looks as if not just the Conservative leader but the whole of the Opposition politics has taken a holiday. We can only hope, for the sake of democracy, that normal service will be resumed as soon as possible.

British papers are hyperactive, desperate for revenue, and now able to read sales data at high speed. No wonder they chase scandal.

Vengeance is ours

Winston Fletcher

LESS than two years into office the Government has decided it is being persecuted by a vindictive press. Even before the Mandelson debacle, Tony Blair was telephoning newspaper bigwigs to ask why their papers were so hostile, and appealing to them to be more objective (by which he meant more complimentary). Politicians have always felt themselves hounded by journalists. It was to gag newspapers' criticisms and reduce their readership that the government whacked duties on both cover prices and advertising revenue in the Stamp Act of 1712. Rarely, however, can a politician press love-in have turned sour so swiftly as this one. Few administrations have come to power on a stronger surge of press support. Yet, last

week, Peter Mandelson claimed that the press enjoyed giving him a good kicking, blaming his downfall on vengeful journalists. A relationship that has always been strained has lately become as unpredictably explosive as a firecracker. Not just for New Labour, but for any government.

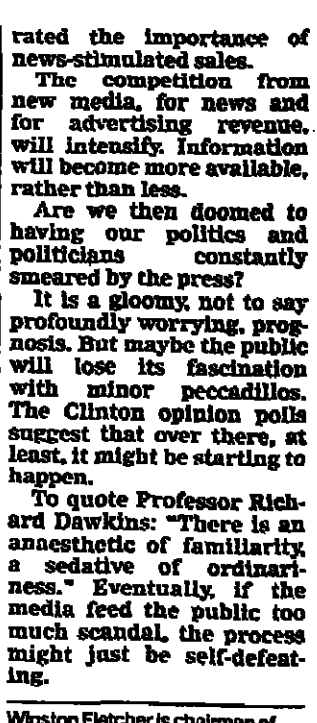
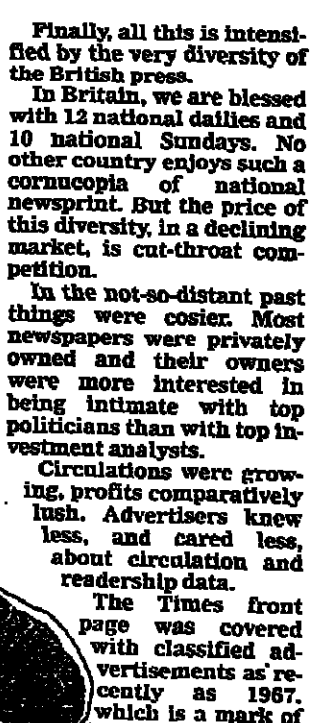
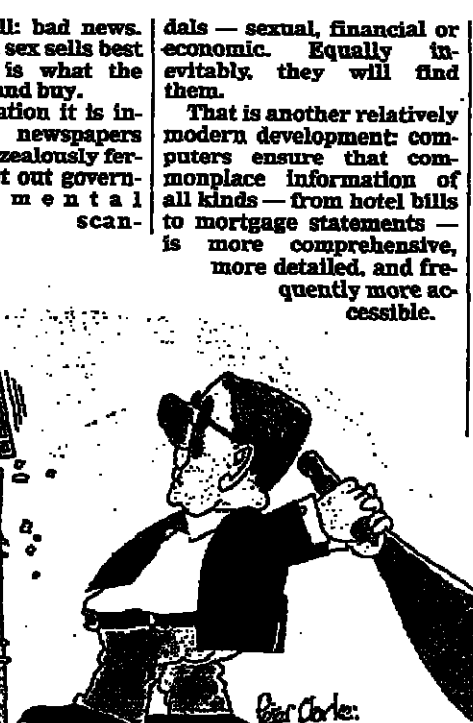
The gale of sleaze which drowned the last administration was a reflection of newspaper hyperactivity as well as of Tory turpitude. With the wisdom of hindsight, it isn't difficult to itemise examples. The problems are endemic in the changing nature of the press, particularly in Britain. During the last decade newspapers have, like most other businesses - obtained sales data faster and faster. Whereas in the past copies were distributed and unsold were returned relatively slowly and inefficiently, today the

information comes through rapidly and accurately. Publishers and editors know what is selling their newspapers with greater precision than ever before. And the figures show it is scandals, misfortunes and disasters. So their natural instincts have been sharpened by brute reality.

THIS has taken place against a background of generally plummeting sales. In 1990 the circulation of all dailies exceeded 15,000,000, now the figure barely exceeds 13,000,000. Over the same period the Sundays have fallen from over 17,000,000 to well under 15,000,000. The growing speed, sophistication and coverage of television news - with portable cameras and twenty-four hour transmissions - has intensified the competition. Newspapers find themselves squabbling desperately for readers. To survive they need news

which will sell: bad news. Bad news plus sex sells best of all. That is what the readers want and buy. In this situation it is inevitable that newspapers will zealously ferret out government mental scandals - sexual, financial or economic. Equally inevitably, they will find them. That is another relatively modern development: computers ensure that commonplace information of all kinds - from hotel bills to mortgage statements - is more comprehensive, more detailed, and frequently more accessible.

Finally, all this is intensified by the very diversity of the British press. In Britain, we are blessed with 12 national dailies and 10 national Sundays. No other country enjoys such a cornucopia of national newspapers. But the price of this diversity, in a declining market, is cut-throat competition. In the not-so-distant past things were cosier. Most newspapers were privately owned and their owners were more interested in being intimate with top politicians than with top investment analysts. Circulations were growing, profits comparatively lush. Advertisers knew less, and cared less, about circulation and readership data. The Times front page was covered with classified advertisements as recently as 1967, which is a mark of how little it then



Winston Fletcher is chairman of the Bazzell advertising group

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Russia in the red

It needs a new sort of help

AS THE year draws to a close, a thought for an economy disintegrating before our eyes, yet which is in danger of being forgotten: Russia. The world has been distracted by other things this year: the Asian crisis, the problems of South America and the crash of the stock markets. While this was happening the Russian economy — which at the turn of the year seemed to have conquered the worst of its horrendous problems since discarding communism in 1991 — started to wither away again as it is in early fulfilment of some Marxian prophecy. Yet as recently as July inflation had been reduced almost to Western levels and economic output was stable after years of debilitating contraction. Then August happened. The rouble was devalued, Russia defaulted on its domestic debts and was without a government for several weeks.

Since then it has been a fresh catalogue of disaster. Inflation is once again soaring towards 100 per cent. Real wages fell by 35 per cent in the three months to October. National output has started falling fast once again. The rouble has collapsed and the once vaunted stock market has lost over 80 per cent of its value, easily the worst performance in the whole world. The proportion of the population living below the poverty line has risen from 18 per cent at the start of last year to 28.5 per cent. People in the north are starving and the government is resorting to the printing

presses to pay months, even years, of back pay to state employees. Earlier this week Russia's prosecutor, General Yuri Skuratov was quoted as saying that almost half of the Russian economy was controlled by organised crime. Yesterday, with an air of tragic inevitability Russia failed to make a debt repayment to the London Club of commercial creditors dating back to the Soviet era thereby falling into technical default. Deprived of international credit and unable to raise taxes at home the Russian government is resorting to the time-honoured practice of printing money. As night follows day such a huge boost to the money supply will lead once again to higher inflation and probably a fresh contraction of the economy. It is as if the privatisation that Russian leaders have suffered these past seven years has been in vain.

What went wrong? Why was "shock therapy" successful in Poland, but not in Russia? With hindsight it is clear that what Russia lacked most of all was the institutional infrastructure to deliver a market economy. There is no point in pumping international money into a banking system if proper banks don't exist. There is no point in privatising everything if de-monopolised legal and management structures don't exist to run them properly let alone prevent criminalisation.

Arguably the single biggest structural reform that Russia needs is an efficient system of tax collection. Tax receipts are reckoned to be less than 60 per cent of target levels this year. If the Russian government could only collect its rightful share of taxes then the vicious circle of financial decline could be averted. Higher income from taxation would reduce the budget deficit and provide real money to pay state employees avoiding the dash to the printing presses. It is at a time like this when the patience

of the rest of the world is being strained that Russia most needs help. Money — lots of it — will still be needed, but it must be channelled in effective ways. Western exchequers have benefited hugely from reduced defence expenditures and other aspects of the "peace dividend". It remains strongly in our self-interest as well as a humanitarian gesture to make a renewed effort to help Russia become a modern economy in the next century.

Stopping Saddam

It will hinder the UN's tasks

THE BOMBING of Iraq has shattered more than anti-aircraft batteries, Republican guards barracks, and tank repair shops. It has shattered the established policies of the UN and of Iraq. America's policy of containment through inspection lies in ruins. Iraq's policy of breaking out of sanctions through cooperation and concealment is a thing of the past. Its demands have repudiated the legitimacy of any constraints on its behaviour at all. Its decision to fire on US and British planes patrolling the no fly zones shows Baghdad in a confrontation which can only undermine its diplomatic objectives.

Iraq's Arab neighbours do not want any more trouble. Their reaction to the Iraqi attempt to whip up a regional front against the US has been to postpone the summit which Baghdad had hoped would condemn the US and the British. The Arab states may not have approved of the attacks, but they will not enlist in a campaign against Washington led by Iraq.

The chances of a compromise have diminished. France finds itself under

diplomatic attack from Iraq — largely because one of the French proposals is that, while sanctions should be progressively lifted, Iraq's oil income must remain under UN control to prevent purchases of weapons. Saddam Hussein likes the first part, but not the second.

America and Britain are right to respond firmly to the Iraqi attempt, both verbally and by missile attacks on our planes, to disrupt the protection we provide the Kurds in the north, and the Shi'ites in the south. This protection is vital to the Kurds, who preserve some freedom under it, and it limits the military reach of Saddam in the south. One of the Iraqi objectives may be to preempt the establishment of no-drive zones by making such a fuss over present arrangements that any extension would be seen as provocative. That should be resisted. No drive would have to be an option if Saddam mounted a military drive into the Kurdish or Shi'ite areas. It could be, controversially, a way of aiding a movement of rebellion.

The clashes this week underline how little remains of the framework within which America and Iraq pursued their objectives in the past. The incompatibility of those objectives is out in the open, which means that the UN and other would-be mediators have an apparently impossible task before them.

Playing statues

Maybe Dickens was right

AS WELL as being a cultural beacon of the post-1945 world, Arthur Koestler is revealed in a new biography as a serial rapist. Now complaints by students at Edinburgh University, where he endowed a

chair of parapsychology have led to the removal of a bronze bust of the intellectual many rank along with Sartre, Camus and Orwell. The real issue here isn't whether this is an extreme example of political correctness; nor whether the feeling of unease that reportedly overcomes some women when they pass the bust is eerie evidence of the paranormal that so fascinated Koestler; but whether public statues cause more trouble than they're worth.

There are always rows about the cost, the site, the likeness, and whether the person commemorated would have preferred donations to charity, not a lifeless monument. There was outrage when the sites selected for a statue of Harold Wilson in his home town of Huddersfield included a loading bay and a multi-storey car park. There was anger and disbelief at the multi-million cost of the recent restoration of the Albert Memorial, which has given the capital a Prince Consort looking like a gilded Buddha. Whatever its virtue as an art form, sculpture is a sterile conduit for celebrating a life well spent. So why clog public spaces with more useless lumps, why fuel feuds about the worth of war-mongers, politicians and roving royals?

Maybe we should have a moratorium on statues before the Edinburgh students claim that the Koestler bust has left its plinth and become a full-length Don Juan, pursuing them down the corridors. Too harsh? Try this: when snowy weather strikes, let's mould ice sculptures of movers and shakers, just as Russians are doing in Moscow parks; a melting reminder to all of the transience of fame. Best of all, the great and the good should follow Dickens who ordered his friends "on no account to make me the subject of any monument, memorial or testimonial whatsoever".

Letters to the Editor

Songs of praise and prejudice

THE Daily Telegraph has been kind to Peter Eastwood, its former night editor, by including him only in a book of rogues (David Mole, December 28). He was worse. He bullied his staff not just to maintain standards but because he found pleasure in humiliating them. His taunts made the life of a Jewish sub-editor in the Sixties a misery and he drove to the edge of nervous collapse a deeply religious chief sub by constantly referring to Christ as homosexual. Being Welsh didn't help either. John Price Williams. Eastbourne.

FURTHER to the confusion about song lyrics, (Letters, December 28) Kenny Rogers brought tears to our eyes when he sang about meeting a woman in a bar who left her husband "with 400 children and a crap in the fields". David Fielding. Newcastle Emlyn, Carmarthenshire.

MY dictionary defines a charity as "an institution giving help to the needy". How can that equate with promoting Nato (MP to head Nato charity, December 28)? Nato is a nuclear armed, military alliance, which has assigned to it annually nearly \$500 billion. Which needy people does it help, and how can the Charity Commissioners allow this to pass their tests for being non-political? Rae Street. Littleborough, Lancs.

WHY does the headline "Nursing crisis looms" merit its prominence on your front page (December 29)? This is just the consequence of the continuation of Conservative policy on public sector pay that the country voted for over-whelmingly in May last year. I. A. Wilks. Birstall, West Yorks.

Grieving and gloating...

GEORGEY Robinson has been a friend of mine for more than 20 years. He is a man of formidable, quite extraordinary energy and intelligence with a brilliant business mind. He is also warmly generous, hospitable and loyal. I once asked a laconic Midlander — one of his constituents — what he was like as an MP. "Geoffrey's family," the man said.

Over the last year we have watched the triumphal, exposure of President Clinton for the sort of minor sexual entanglement that many politicians are prone to. If men of this calibre are scrutinised with microscopic malice, exposed for actions sexual or financial — that are essentially private, and gloatingly vilified by the press (I speak as a journalist), who will be left to govern us. Perfection is rare, and those who mind their backs from the age of 16 do not make great leaders.

Geoffrey Robinson is a much bigger and better man than the cohorts of self-congratulating journalists who sifted through his business affairs and, failing to find a single illegal transaction, cas-

tigated him for an act of generosity. His loss to this government is immense. Angela Lambert. London.

CONGRATULATIONS Eve issue brought glad tidings of great joy: six pages, about the Fall I got down to the dregs of this heavy brew of cream, scum and froth.

I read every word, gloatingly. A feast of fulsome tributes, hollow regrets, speculation about deeper repercussions, choice bits from recent history. A pity John Smith could not be present to behold his misgivings completely justified. But then, had he been, the rise of PM would not have been possible. Nobody minds the loan in itself, but against a background of an ever-widening gap between rich and poor these furtive financial favours just sink: expected under the Tories perhaps — but New Labour? This matter should be regarded as a symptom, not a mere mistake. Where on earth are we heading? Tony Hill. Devon.

QUESTIONS remain unanswered about Geoffrey Robinson's personal loan of to Peter Mandelson. Was the loan made by bank transfer, bank order, by cheque or in cash? Was it declared to the Inland Revenue? And has income tax been paid on it?

I ask because in 1990 I was subjected to a withering tirade based on false allegations by Robert Maxwell's Mirror Group and Central TV's Cook Report, including one about a personal loan/mortgage which I did not have.

Peter Mandelson, a key aide to Neil Kinnock's and Geoffrey Robinson were involved with the Mirror Group or other Maxwell companies. Mandelson was a columnist, whilst Robinson was a director of several Maxwell companies and is now under investigation by the DTI. Senior Labour MPs close to the then leader called for an inquiry into the allegations against me. I am sure Mr Mandelson would welcome a similar inquiry. Arthur Scargill. President, National Union of Mineworkers.



Rambling on about locked gates

RAMBLERS do not normally climb gates, unless they are illegally blocking a public path (Letters, December 28). Nor are they accompanied on their walks by a bevy of photographers. This was no ordinary ramble but a photo opportunity to demonstrate that we were being unreasonably excluded from an area of moorland. We did not climb over the gate and trespass. But once we have won our campaign for freedom to roam there will be far fewer locked gates to climb. Kate Ashbrook. Chairman, Ramblers' Association Access Committee.

AS A PAST chairman of the Area, I also deplore in the apparent climbing of a gate by more than one rambler at a time. Conversely, a farmer has no right, to string barbed wire across a gate if its on a right of way.

There is, though, no indication that the gate is on a right of way or, indeed, that the ramblers are about to climb it. If the gate is on a right of way, the farmer has committed an offence. If it is not, then, given the position from which he took the picture, Steve Forrest is committing an act of trespass. Ron Graves. Birkenhead, Wirral.

Saintly whinge from Wales

PERHAPS, if he had spent Christmas reading the island stories by the late Raphael Samuel, Roy Hattersley (Endpiece, December 28) would not need to wear his Little Englander hat. If he needs a saint as "our Trust doctor for the Tudors" why not George Bernard Shaw? Christianity had been alive and well in Wales for centuries. Wales has a legion of True

British-born saints to compare with the Man of the Millennium. Apart from the obvious, David, there are numerous local candidates such as Cadog.

If he needs a writer, why Shakespeare, who was a spin doctor for the Tudors? Why not George Bernard Shaw? whose plays still provide practical handbook for Socialists. J G Owen. Caerphilly.

Soper was a giant of our time, but he won't be the last

YOUR coverage of the death of Lord Soper (reports and obituary December 28) quotes an Anglican as saying he was one of the last great Protestant leaders. What makes him so sure he was one of the last? We are, of course, used to reading cocksure predictions of the demise of Protestantism in the now largely pro-Catholic press, yet Protestant churches (of a certain kind) continue to grow while nearly all the mainstream denominations are in decline. For anyone who cares to come and listen they offer some of the finest preaching to be found anywhere, delivered by local church leaders with every bit as much power and conviction as Lord Soper could muster; and when they are dead and gone others will follow.

There is a whole unknown world of vigorous Free Church life out there, almost totally ignored by the media, but with enough spiritual momentum to ensure that when giants like Lord Soper pass to their rest

there will always be others, of greater or lesser fame, to carry on the great tradition of uncompromising Nonconformist preaching for the generations ahead. Christopher Rogers. Suffolk.

THE death of Lord Donald Soper will greatly sadden many people. He was arguably one of the greatest public figures of this century. Whether or not we agreed with his views, is not the point. The point is we knew exactly what his views were! How many public figures are there now, who make themselves that clear? Eric Beckmann. Horley, Surrey.

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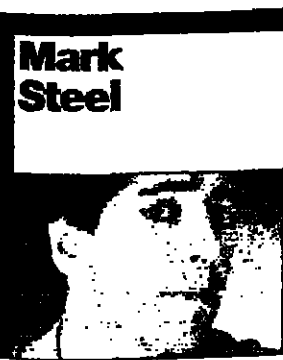
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Almost a gentleman



I WANTED to live somewhere with more of the feel of a neighbourhood, a million pounds' worth of house. There's all he wanted: community spirit. Like in the old days, when you could leave your front door open, and know that no one would sneak in for an unauthorised look at your art deco sculptures. A feel of neighbourhood, where someone would always get the

shopping in for the old folk. Unfortunately they'd always come back with two tickets for the ballet and an antique lamp, so the poor old biddies would starve to death. Somewhere the whole neighbourhood would join together, round the old piano, and sing along to An Pair, What Can The Matter Be? and Show Me The Way To Buy Homes.

Even sillier was the article he wrote two weeks ago in the Daily Telegraph. This rejoiced at how his white paper proved "Labour has dumped its interventionist past", and praised the "yawning gulf" between New Labour and Wilson. It went on: "New Labour has no hang-ups about people making themselves rich as a result of entrepreneurial success, so long as it is deserved". As long as it is deserved? With entrepreneurial genius such as the vision and initiative to say: "Here, Geoffrey, you couldn't lend us 373,000 sovs could you?" If, as he insists, he did not

ing wrong, then surely this arrangement should be available to everyone. There should be radio adverts saying "Hurry hurry hurry to the Bank of Robinson, for our price mortgages at a crazy knockdown rate you won't believe! The fixed rate over the first two years is nothing, and with our special repayment scheme you pay a bit off when you fancy it, or if you'd rather not, then don't bother!" "We'll lend you up to 10 times your salary no questions asked, because life's complicated enough. Warning — ministerial careers can go down as well as up."

Commentators have pondered how a manipulative genius could make such a mistake. The answer probably lies in the difference between him and Blair. Mandelson's background is nowhere near as affluent as the swinging rich he aspires to. And having decided that the richer you seem to be, the more worthwhile you are, he couldn't

bear to give the appearance of someone who reflected his actual wealth. He's the political version of the family that bankrupts itself by paying for public-dashing and a fountain in the front lawn.

BLAIR, with his privileged background, plays down his roots, heading footballs with Kevin Keegan and being a lad with Des O'Connor. But Mandelson does the opposite. He flaunts his pretend money and takes every opportunity to smear at the ordinary people he believes he's superior to. In the process, maybe he convinces himself of his own importance, like a name-dropping actor.

For example, defending the Dome to an old Labour councillor on television, he said "You have to remember that most people lead very humdrum lives." Which was as ridiculous as it was arrogant. Did he think that people

would come up to him on their knees, spluttering: "Thank-you, O spinning one. My hitherto humdrum existence has at last been given a sense of purpose, for I have seen before me a huge round thing with sticks pointing out?"

And did he hang out with his glittery chums because Prince Charles is a genuinely close mate, Liz Murdoch's a right laugh after a few beers, and he really wanted to know what Camilla thought of his plans for British Aerospace? His obsession with being a celebrity made him a useless spin doctor, divorced from reality. When he tried to get elected to the executive of his own party, he proved to be far less popular than Ken Livingstone, the man he had constantly denied.

If he stands for mayor of London, a Mandelson v Archer contest could provide democracy's first ever nil-nil draw.

The real tragedy of Mandelson's psychosis is that

Professor Martin Rodbell

How they broke the G-code

PROFESSOR Martin Rodbell, the American biochemist and winner of the Nobel Prize for Medicine and Physiology in 1994, has died at the age of 73. His work has had widespread implications for the treatment of human diseases.

Working with Alfred Gilman, Rodbell discovered that the biochemical activities inside cells were controlled by an elaborate communications system and depended on a vast family of molecules now known as the G-proteins. These molecules spring into action when, for example, liver and muscle cells have to release energy-producing glucose in response to a surge of adrenaline. Small changes in G-proteins, as does the sensation of taste. Yet other types exert control over cell division, as embryos grow into babies.

Many symptoms of disease can now be explained by abnormal G-proteins. Cholera is a classic example. The dramatic loss of salt and water in cholera patients is a direct consequence of the action of cholera toxin on G-proteins, preventing absorption by the intestine. Other abnormalities are linked to diabetes, alcoholism and some forms of cancer.

Born of Jewish parents, Rodbell lived above his father's small grocery store and delivered groceries in a working-class district of Baltimore, Maryland. An aptitude for science and mathematics was soon apparent at school, and he went on to Baltimore City College, an unusual public high school for the United States in being an all boys' academy. His emphasis was on languages, with little on any science. So Rodbell spent his school days torn between an attraction to

French and the fascination of science. He won a place at Johns Hopkins University but the second world war intervened and he was sent with the Marines to the Philippines. In the jungle he contracted malaria and spent the rest of the war in ships' radio rooms.

After the war Rodbell began pre-medical studies at Johns Hopkins, but a tutor there persuaded him to specialise in biochemistry. In 1950 he began his PhD research in a newly-created department of biochemistry, at Washington University, Seattle - whose outstanding staff included Edwin Krebs and Edmond Fischer, who were to win the



Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1992. Rodbell's research was into the way certain liver cells produced fatty substances. He concluded that the molecule ATP (adenosine triphosphate) was the key to the process.

Just before he was about to publish the results, a research paper from Harvard, by Eugene Kennedy, showed that another molecule called CTP (cytidine triphosphate) was responsible. Rodbell couldn't fathom where he had gone wrong. He called Kennedy and learned that extracts of ATP -

derived for research purposes from horse muscle - were rarely 100 per cent pure, but were often contaminated. Kennedy suggested there was some CTP in the extract which caused the effect attributed to ATP. It was a lesson Rodbell never forgot.

In 1956 he joined the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland, where he made his Nobel Prize-winning discoveries. It was here that Rodbell devised a special way of studying the response of a cell to hormones, in what is still one of the most widely used methods in hormone research.

Back at Washington University in Seattle, his early

A Nobel prize-winner, Rodbell carried out work which has had widespread implications for the treatment of human diseases

mentors had begun to unravel the way enzymes within a cell caused the release of substances like glucose into the bloodstream. They revealed the importance of the activity of a molecule called cyclic AMP (adenosine monophosphate). Rodbell was intrigued by a related question. How did the relevant message get through the cell walls to tell the AMP to become active? The widely-accepted idea was of a simple cause and effect, in which the processes inside the cell were prompted by the

stimulation of a receptor on the cell membrane - the "single messenger" theory. Rodbell showed the theory was flawed and that the process must involve other molecules. He reasoned that a much more complex communications system was needed for cells to carry out the variety of things of which they were capable. In break-through experiments in 1970 and 1971, he tested a new idea about the events that occurred when receptors were stimulated by hormones. He suggested that the hormone must trigger a communication chain of at least three components. He called these the discriminator (the receptor in the cell wall), a transducer (what it was he didn't know), and an amplifier (which regulated the cyclic AMP).

In the face of great scepticism, he demonstrated the second, or intermediary, step. He called it signal transduction, and established that it involved a molecule called GTP (guanosine triphosphate) in an experiment in which his experience of contamination proved invaluable. Rodbell was again working with ATP extracts and getting a reaction that did not make sense. Further study showed that traces of contamination by the molecule GTP, or its cousin GDE, had caused the reaction. It was a critical step in the discovery of how messages were passed through the cell wall and received inside by G-proteins.

Rodbell is survived by his wife, Barbara Lederman Rodbell, three sons and a daughter.

Pearce Wright

Martin Rodbell, biochemist, born December 1, 1925; died December 7, 1998



At the helm... Glyn Charles with crewman George Skondus competing for Britain in the 1997 Olympic Games

Glyn Charles

Voyage of discovery

GLYN CHARLES, who was lost at sea during the Sydney-Hobart Race this week, was spotted at the age of 13 by the Royal Yachting Association youth coach Jim Saltonstall as having the "charisma, motivation and determination" to make a success of sailing.

When Charles was with boats, there was always a smile on his face. His mother, Margaret, said that he had died doing what he loved most in the world, and all those who met him would agree with her. Born in Wales and educated in Winchester and at Portsmouth Polytechnic, he began sailing in Chichester harbour. His one-time coach, the RYA racing manager Rod Carr, said that at 13 he was "a late starter, competitively. Glyn sailed around Bosham Creek, but he didn't race like many of his contemporaries."

Carr believes that Glyn Charles only began to realise his potential when he joined the RYA youth squad. He was thwarted by other talented sailors from being selected for the British team at the World Youth Championship

despite being in the top three in the country but soon became the national champion of the Laser class, one of the most difficult boats in which to succeed. That victory became the foundation on which he was able to build his career.

Charles spread his sailing interests in a catholic manner, making his determination to succeed a noticeable feature at all regattas. But this did nothing to mar his popularity. Glyn did not have enemies, because there was no reason to dislike him, perhaps because he was, in Carr's words, "not a political monkey." He eschewed the mind games of his rivals; he didn't even learn to play them. Everyone agreed that in the sailing world Glyn Charles was "a good bloke".

He had two attempts at Olympic selection in the Soling class, in 1988 and 1993, but was beaten both times by Lawrie Smith. He then faced his former nemesis in the Star class for 1996 and triumphed. At Savannah, when the world rankings were turned upside down, he was 11th. He would certainly have improved on

bright to be good. He suffered what I call 'paralysis by analysis'. He added that it was only as Charles grew older that he was able to see the wood from the trees. Earlier he had examined the possible causes of failure, without them happening. He was always totally honest about his own capabilities.

To be an Olympic medal was his aim, and he used the rest of his sailing to fund that burning ambition. The RYA had backed him for 2000 in Sydney with a fully-funded campaign and a boat that was paid for. He was teamed with Mark Covell, and the two had begun to scale the walls of this sporting bastion with a sixth place at SEA this year. They were due to compete in the world championship in Melbourne in January.

Glyn Charles lived with his girlfriend, Annie Goodman, who shared his passion for sailing.

Bob Fisher

Glyn Charles, yachtsman, born September 4, 1965; died December 27, 1998

Vittorio Cottafavi

Lost hero of Italian film

THE ITALIAN film and TV director, Vittorio Cottafavi, who has died at the age of 84, was best known for his costume spectacles made in the 1950s and early 1960s, for which he was later to be acclaimed, particularly by French critics, as a cult figure.

It was François Truffaut who brought his name to the attention of his colleagues at Cahiers du Cinéma with an enthusiastic review of Cottafavi's update of the Marguerite Gautier story, *Traviata '53*. In *Time Out* Film Guide the only Cottafavi film listed is one of his most popular mythological music-box creations, *Hercules Conquers Atlantis* (1961), which David Thompson praised for its "simplicity and excellent pictorial value. Along with a lively ironical approach to history these are the elements which most distinguish Cottafavi's work in the cinema."

Cottafavi was one of the first directors to exercise imaginative skills in adapting famous literary and dramatic works for the small screen in Italy. He turned to television after the flop in 1965 of one of his most ambitious films, *I Cento Cavalieri* (The Hundred Knights), for which he had convinced the producers to let him horse around with the medieval religious wars between Moors and Christians in Spain. As he was to admit after the film's box-office fiasco, his mistake had been to believe that he could apply Brechtian methods to a popular commercial genre. Critics and audiences snubbed

his film, which was made more inaccessible by the distributor's panicky decision to cut 600 metres.

Messalina, Imperial Venus (1969), one of his better costume spectacles, shows more interest in describing daily life in Ancient Rome than in the seductions and misdeeds of Claudius's wife. As an example of his feeling for Brecht, he stops the main action to show us two comic



Cottafavi...ironical style

actors performing Plautus's *Miles Gloriosus* to a poor audience squatting in the piazza.

Cottafavi was probably too much of a self-conscious intellectual to become a good director of commercial film. Born in Modena, he was christened Benedetto. Vittorio Emanuele Secondo (Blessed Victor Emmanuel Second), which showed he came from a monarchist family. Although his main interests were literature and theatre, he chose to study at the newly-opened film school, the Centro Sperimentale, in Rome, where

he was one of the first graduates to become a professional director. In 1942 he made his first film *I nostri sogni* (Our Dreams), based on a play by Ugo Betti. In the heyday of neo-realism he also directed a rhetorical film about a carabinieri hero, *Le fiamme che non si spegne* (The Flame Which Never Dies), for which he was accused of fascist sympathies by some critics at the 1949 Venice Festival.

In reality his ironical approach to the character of Hercules showed that he found the superhero image, which like others of his generation had been nurtured in propaganda about the potent virility of Il Duce, was really rather ridiculous. Cottafavi then turned to TV, where his adaptations ranged from *Lorca to Tennessee Williams*, from Conrad to Chesterton. He even did a life of Dante with Giorgio Albertazzi.

His last film, *Il diavolo sulle colline* (Devil On The Hills), was commissioned as a feature by TV and shown in the Certain Regard section at Cannes in 1988. Although it never reached the cinemas, it was an elegant adaptation of Cesare Pavese's novella of the same title, the story which inspired Antonioni's *Le amiche*. Never as successful as Antonioni as an auteur, Cottafavi still had his moments of glory - as one of the "forgotten" masters of genre movies. He leaves a wife and son.

John Francis Lane

Vittorio Cottafavi, film director, born January 30, 1914; died December 14, 1998

A Country Diary

WENLOCK EDGE: It was the dead robin that marked year's end for me. On the eve of the winter solstice, cutting over-greens for decorations, I found the body of a robin fell at my feet. His wings held slivers of ice - he had one eye open, one closed, feet clenched; his red breast, matted down one side, remained defiantly aflame. I held his body in one hand in the vain hope that warmth might revive him. But his ferocious life had gone and his body felt ominously heavy. In one mythological cycle at this time of year the Oak King, symbolised by the wren, is killed by the Holly King, symbolised by the New Year robin on St Stephen's Day. So what happens when the robin is supposed to kill the wren, I walked up through the woods to the top of the Edge. The moon, waxing towards the first full moon of the new year, shone in puddles along the squelchy path. The rain stopped, skies cleared and the wind began to build. I could hardly stand as a huge burst of wind made the hedges growl, hurtling towards the orange glow of Tebbard away to the north. Throughout the night the wind battered the Edge under a clear starlit sky. Strange days indeed.

PAUL EVANS

Irene Hervey

In and out of the movies

Irene Hervey, who has died aged 78, was the pure girl who won the heart of mild-mannered sheriff James Stewart over wild-cat dance-hall girl Madeline Dietrich in the classic George Marshall 1939 comedy western *Destry Rides Again*. The pretty, dimpled Hervey seemed destined to be overshadowed by bigger stars in some of her more prestigious films and to languish in dozens of B-movies. She suffered both from a lack of ambition and an overweening Christian Scientist mother.

Born Irene Herwick in Los Angeles, the daughter of a sign painter, she married a musician while still in her teens. Divorced after a few

years, and with a baby to support, she was given a screen test at MGM. Her promising film debut was in *The Stranger's Return* (1933), King Vidor's study of rural life. However, her role as the long-suffering wife of philanthropist farmer Franchot Tone gave her no ammunition to compete with the star, Miriam Hopkins.

She had a better chance to shine on loan to 20th Century-Fox in *Charlie Chan in Shanghai* (1935), cheerfully helping the oriental detective catch opium smugglers. Back at MGM, she provided some romance for fugitive gunman Chester Morris in the third of four versions of *Three Coffin* (1936). In the same year, after having been engaged briefly to Robert Taylor, she met the handsome singer Allan Jones, who was riding high at MGM as the star of *Shoubooz* and *Rose Marie*. Their son, Jack Jones, was born in 1938, and became even more famous than his parents.

When her husband moved over to Universal, Hervey managed to get a contract at the same studio, although the couple only co-starred once, in

The Boys From Syracuse (1940), in which they sang Rogers and Hart's *Feeling In Love With Love* together. In 1943, Hervey was seriously injured in a car crash, and her career was put on hold for five years. She returned to the screen as the sophisticated wife of William Powell in *My Penpal and the Mermaid*. In *The Lucky Stuff* (1949) she again had to compete with bigger stars such as Dorothy Lamour and Claire Trevor. There was no such rivalry on television in the 1950s, where she was able to make a reputation in better roles. Hervey, who divorced Allan Jones in 1957, appeared in the series *Perry Mason*, *Dr Kildare*, *My Three Sons* and *Ironsides*. Her last two movies were *Cactus Flower* (1969) and *Clint Eastwood's Play Misty for Me* (1971). Later she got a job with a travel firm, which enabled her to attend many of her son's nightclub shows around the world.

Ronald Bergan

Irene Hervey, film actress, born July 11, 1910; died December 20, 1998



Hervey...on the set with Don Porter (left) and Leif Erickson

The Earl of Lanesborough

The model train took the strain



Lanesborough...a railway buff but still rejected by BR

DENIS Anthony Brian Butler, the 9th Earl of Lanesborough, who has died aged 80, was an enthusiastic hobbyist, particularly for railways. This enthusiasm was inherited from his grandfather, who, on family holidays in the south of France, used to ride in the engine-driver's cab all the way from Paris to Nice. He himself took a course in engine-driving at the LNER centre in Darlington. At his 3,000-acre estate, Swinstead Hall, he built his 600-foot model railway, a replica of the Fort William-to-Carlisle line, with 300 pieces of rolling stock.

All this went in the wake of inheriting his title in 1950, which was followed by crippling death duties. These forced him to sell Swinstead Hall, with his model railway. BR turned down his application for an engine-driver's

job and he had to settle for a job of selling cars in a Leicester garage.

Things had looked different when Denis was born the elder son of the then Baron Newton-Butler, the lesser family title from the days when they had settled in Ireland in 1715. Young Denis grew up at Swinstead Hall, and was educated at Stowe. Just 21 and married to Bettyne Everard, when the second world war came he joined the Leicestershire Yeomanry, rising to major.

Initially having a title and an estate had its compensations. Divorced in 1950, the year he became earl, he could organise a lavish ball in 1951 for the Canadian screen temptress, Yvonne de Carlo, best known for her role as Salome. Social events of the period were enlivened by his party trick - neatly cracking walnuts with his forehead.

The 9th Earl served on the Trent Regional Health Authority and became its vice-chairman for four years from 1978. He was a member of the National Gas Consumers Council for five years from 1973. The family title will now survive mainly in the name of the Lanesborough Hotel, off Hyde Park Corner, on the site of St George's Hospital, itself based on the family house, sold in 1733, of the Irish Viscount Lanesborough.

He is survived by his daughter, Lady Deyenne Gillian Patricia, and by his second wife, Patricia Meeson, who married him in 1995 after 45 years as his secretary.

Andrew Roth

Denis Anthony Brian Butler, 9th Earl of Lanesborough, born October 28, 1918; died December 21, 1998

Birthdays

Gordon Banks, footballer, 61; David Bedford, athlete, 49; Prof Sir Roy Calne, surgeon and immunologist, 68; Gerald Davies, Controller, BBC Wales, 55; Sir John Houghton, environmentalist, 67; Jenny Hall, actress, 60; Sir Peter Hall, actor, 60; Rosalinde Wiseman, microbiologist, 62; Timothy Mo, writer, 48; Rev Peter Nott, Bishop of Norwich, 65; Mary Rayner, children's writer, 65; Patti Smith, singer-songwriter, 42; Stan Tracey, jazz pianist, 72; Tracy Ullman, comedienne, 38.

Death Notices

BEAL, James, on 23rd December 1998, James and Betty, peacefully after a long illness, late of 24, Elmwood, which really pleased her off. Private funeral. No flowers, please, but donations if desired to: St. John's Hospice, 100, West End, Exeter, Devon. Memorial celebration to follow.

DEVIN, Hugh Brandon, CBE, FRCGS (1940), in which they sang Rogers and Hart's *Feeling In Love With Love* together. In 1943, Hervey was seriously injured in a car crash, and her career was put on hold for five years. She returned to the screen as the sophisticated wife of William Powell in *My Penpal and the Mermaid*. In *The Lucky Stuff* (1949) she again had to compete with bigger stars such as Dorothy Lamour and Claire Trevor.

JONES, Evelyn Mary, the long socialist, after a long illness, died on 20th December 1998, after a long illness, late of 24, Elmwood, which really pleased her off. Private funeral. No flowers, please, but donations if desired to: St. John's Hospice, 100, West End, Exeter, Devon. Memorial celebration to follow.

SHAW, John, died peacefully (Chronic Kidney Disease) on 20th December 1998, after a long illness, late of 24, Elmwood, which really pleased her off. Private funeral. No flowers, please, but donations if desired to: St. John's Hospice, 100, West End, Exeter, Devon. Memorial celebration to follow.

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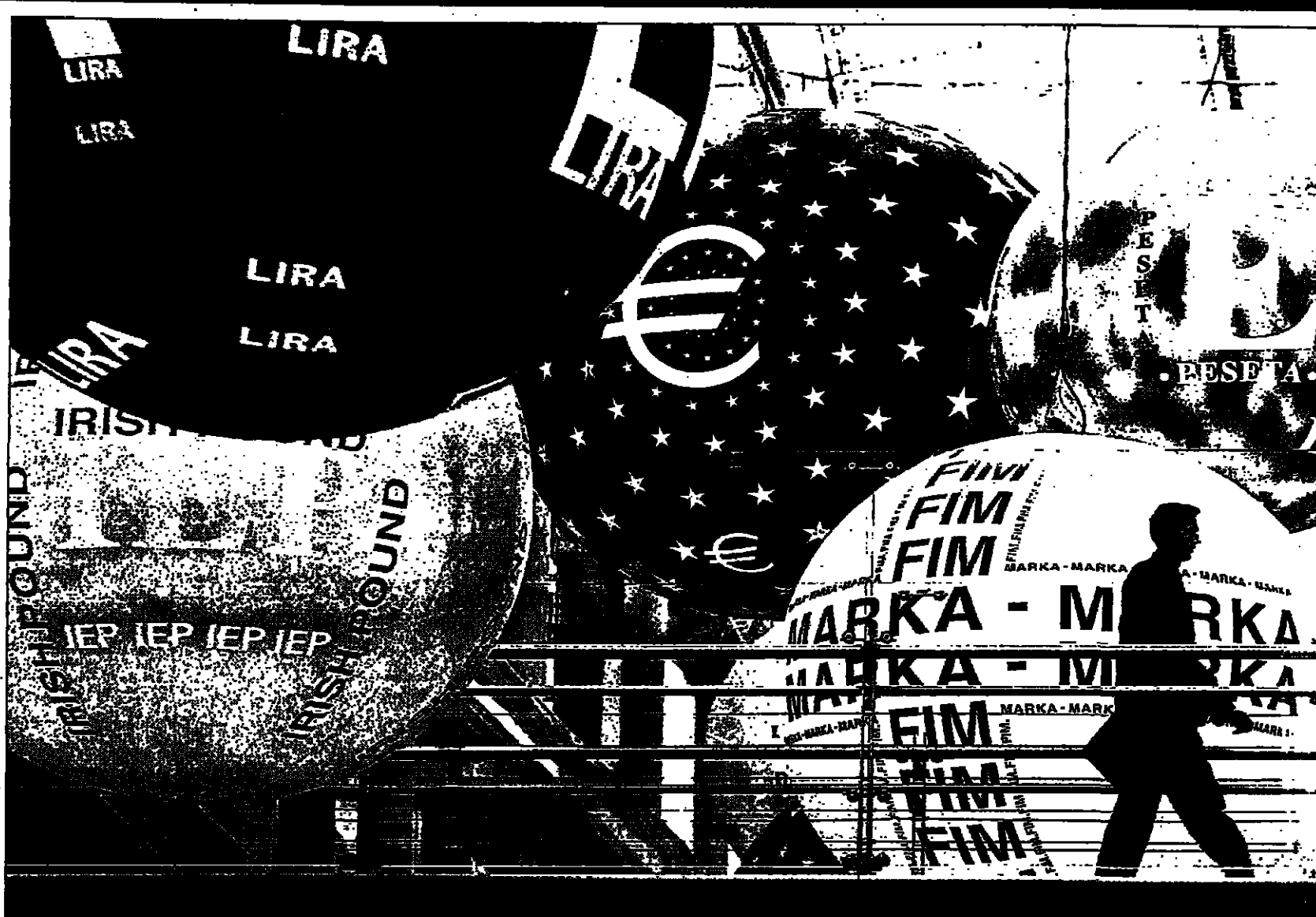
The single currency

'Britain is not part of the European business cycle, but part of the American, Anglo-Saxon cycle'
Nick Gibb MP



Monetary union is the unknown territory over which the next election will be fought, write **Michael White and Charlotte Denny**

2001: a political odyssey into the future



Idea takes flight... the balloons go up in the Marché St Honoré, Paris, outside merchant bank Paribas. Each huge illuminated inflatable represents a Eurozone currency. The pound is missing. PHOTOGRAPH: JACK DABAGHAN

IT'S May 2001. A date is set for a general election in four weeks time. It will be a campaign fought on whether Britain has suffered from opting out of the single currency. Tony Blair and William Hague are ready to lock horns on the hustings over the costs and benefits of joining EMU.

By the time the United Kingdom next goes to the polls, the euro will be two and a half years old. Many of the uncertainties surrounding the currency at its launch will have been resolved and the economic consequences for Britain of staying out will be clearer, at least in the short and medium term.

But the campaign is also about the politics of the European Union for many of those taking part in what is, in effect, a dry run for the referendum that will follow Labour's expected election victory, albeit by a much narrower margin than predicted after the 1997 landslide.

Those prepared to take a punt on the economic outlook for the next two years paint very different scenarios depending on where they stand in the EMU debate. So do those who look at the constitutional dimension: can Britain remain a sovereign, self-governing state while participating in a single currency and all that entails? Yes, say those in the pro-camp. No, say the sceptics.

For Europhiles, it is simple. Britain will miss out on the benefits of the most significant European development since the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957. The 11 founder members enjoy steady growth, insulated from the turmoil still reverberating throughout the world's financial markets. Using one currency will make companies more competitive and consumers will benefit from lower prices.

Meanwhile, outside the Eurozone, sterling's volatility will be a continuing headache for exporters, the City's competitive advantage in the financial markets will be destroyed and a flood of Japanese and American business investment will relocate to the Continent. On the other hand, the Eurosceptics outline a darker scenario for the country participating in the new currency. EMU will bring Europe's faltering growth shuddering to a halt as Wim

Duisenberg and his anti-inflation hawks on the new European Central Bank (ECB) wind up interest rates to foil German and French policy-makers' attempts to boost employment with looser fiscal policy.

That in turn will ramp up the Euro's value against other world currencies and guarantee the deflationary scenario that already hovers over Europe. On the outside, say sceptics in the Labour and Tory ranks (not to mention the Institute of Directors), Britain will benefit both from lower sterling and the ability to absorb external economic shocks with an independent

monetary policy. The Labour leaders, with Gordon Brown, the Chancellor, setting the tone, for Mr Blair, have insisted from the start that EMU is an economic issue, to be judged by the Treasury's five tests of national self-interest, not a constitutional one. William Hague's Tories say it is both economic and political. They accuse tabloid angst over the Queen's head disappearing from the coinage but argue more deeply that a country which does not control monetary policy — interest and exchange rates — will soon lose control over tax policy, investment and much else.

If the pro-camp says it is the biggest decision since 1956, the anti-camp likens it to 1940, a moment deeply embedded in the British psyche, when Winston Churchill led the forces of defiance against Hitler.

Euro-federalists see the new Europe preventing such destructive tribal wars. More dispassionate analysts suggest the apocalyptic economic scenarios on both sides are rather overdone. "In the short term, the costs of staying out are mainly political," says Professor Charles Bean of the London School of Economics.

"EMU at the end of the day is a political project. Economically the costs and benefits either way are relatively small."

Professor Bean agrees that if the euro is a "weak" currency — its value against the pound and other outside currencies falls — some companies who do much of their business with Europe will be in trouble. But, he says, companies can protect themselves against that risk by hedging — taking out financial instruments as insurance against depreciation.

However, Bronwyn Curtis, chief economist at the Japanese bank Nomura, is less sanguine. She thinks sterling could return to its uncomfortably high levels of earlier years when it was boosted in the run-up to EMU by nervous investors worried that the new currency would not be as strong as those it is replacing. Although sterling returns on the Continent, driving up the value of the euro.

The US dollar is widely expected to fall because of America's ballooning trade deficit. The pound usually moves in lockstep with the greenback. The same point could be made about British politics. Only this month Mr Blair said that choosing between Europe and the US was a "false choice". We could have both, as the bridge between the two, interlocked with our special place in Nato, in the Commonwealth and the United Nations Security Council.

That may be inspired by nostalgia. A United Europe will want Britain and France's places on the Security Council. Britain outside Eurozone would be marginalised, even more Washington's lapdog than it appeared in the recent Gulf attacks. The Euros say our

fate lies in Europe, so does our influence. We must choose! Nonsense, the Tories will say in the 2001 election campaign and in the referendum expected the following spring. Britain is a free trading nation, not a static mercantilist European land power. When forced to choose between Europe and the open sea it always picks the sea.

By that argument, there is a world out there eager to trade with a small, inventive nation. The Britain of 2001 will not be as recklessly confident as it was in 1940.

But the habits of self-government are deeply entrenched. Blair's constitutional shake-up may make Britain fit for a Europe of the Regions, with its devolved assemblies and judge-made law. We shall see. Jobs will loom larger in many voters' minds.

As well as the behaviour of sterling, the big unknowns are whether UK businesses will relocate in the Eurozone in order to enjoy the advantages of the single currency and whether Britain's position at the head of the inward investment league table will be threatened.

Professor Bean thinks that financial services firms are unlikely to flood out of London once the euro is launched. "I think businesses make decisions about location based on access to markets and regulatory regimes."

Ms Curtis isn't so sure. "The City will be gradually undermined. You can already see it happening."

So will we rage against the dying of the Westminister light? Or go quietly into what we hope will be a dull, prosperous future. That is the question.

Two days before the launch of the single currency, a committee of MPs set up to discuss Britain's preparations for the euro has still to meet.

Liberal Democrats claim that the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, is dithering over setting up the cross-party committee on the euro in the face of Conservative opposition.

Malcolm Bruce, the Lib-Dem Treasury spokesman, has complained that the Labour government, which was meant to start discussing ways of preparing Britain for the euro in the autumn, has not held any meetings

because the Tories want to limit its scope. Angry Liberal Democrats claim the Tories will not sit on the committee if it discusses preparations for British entry.

They want to limit discussions to Britain's preparations for the introduction of the euro on the Continent.

In a letter to the Chancellor, Mr Bruce says: "I hope you will not give in to such partisan pressure which cannot be in the national interest."

However, Michael Willis, the Labour backbencher who is to chair the committee, last night promised that the committee would meet in the new year.

"The Swiss franc and sterling will be the main alternatives to the European currencies for investors. There is a danger that sterling could continue to be high and volatile." On the other hand, some analysts say many factors are likely to cause the pound to sink against the euro. First, most forecasts suggest Britain will be growing at a slower rate than the rest of Europe next year, which will cause investors to seek better returns on the Continent, driving up the value of the euro.

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Squabble delays MPs' euro talks

Nicholas Watt
Political Correspondent

TWO days before the launch of the single currency, a committee of MPs set up to discuss Britain's preparations for the euro has still to meet.

Liberal Democrats claim that the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, is dithering over setting up the cross-party committee on the euro in the face of Conservative opposition.

Malcolm Bruce, the Lib-Dem Treasury spokesman, has complained that the Labour government, which was meant to start discussing ways of preparing Britain for the euro in the autumn, has not held any meetings

because the Tories want to limit its scope. Angry Liberal Democrats claim the Tories will not sit on the committee if it discusses preparations for British entry.

They want to limit discussions to Britain's preparations for the introduction of the euro on the Continent.

In a letter to the Chancellor, Mr Bruce says: "I hope you will not give in to such partisan pressure which cannot be in the national interest."

However, Michael Willis, the Labour backbencher who is to chair the committee, last night promised that the committee would meet in the new year.

"The Swiss franc and sterling will be the main alternatives to the European currencies for investors. There is a danger that sterling could continue to be high and volatile." On the other hand, some analysts say many factors are likely to cause the pound to sink against the euro. First, most forecasts suggest Britain will be growing at a slower rate than the rest of Europe next year, which will cause investors to seek better returns on the Continent, driving up the value of the euro.

The US dollar is widely expected to fall because of America's ballooning trade deficit. The pound usually moves in lockstep with the greenback. The same point could be made about British politics. Only this month Mr Blair said that choosing between Europe and the US was a "false choice". We could have both, as the bridge between the two, interlocked with our special place in Nato, in the Commonwealth and the United Nations Security Council.

That may be inspired by nostalgia. A United Europe will want Britain and France's places on the Security Council. Britain outside Eurozone would be marginalised, even more Washington's lapdog than it appeared in the recent Gulf attacks. The Euros say our

fate lies in Europe, so does our influence. We must choose! Nonsense, the Tories will say in the 2001 election campaign and in the referendum expected the following spring. Britain is a free trading nation, not a static mercantilist European land power. When forced to choose between Europe and the open sea it always picks the sea.

By that argument, there is a world out there eager to trade with a small, inventive nation. The Britain of 2001 will not be as recklessly confident as it was in 1940.

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Loose change sans frontières

Ian Wylie offers a practical guide for tourists and travellers to the euro-zone

YOU MAY not feel the full force of the euro until Britain joins the European Monetary Union (EMU). But Europhobes and Europhiles alike will soon encounter the new currency on their travels.

EMU makes its debut on New Year's Day in 11 countries and anyone planning to travel to Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal or Spain after that date will find it difficult to avoid the euro.

When you arrive, you are likely to see dual pricing of goods in euros and the local currency in the longer-term, price transparency thanks to the euro, could also mean cheaper fares and car rentals. The strength of the euro may have an impact on the cost of holidaying in different parts of Europe. A strong euro, for example, could make holidays to Spain, Portugal or Italy more expensive compared to non-EMU destinations such as Greece or Turkey.

Until Britain signs up to EMU, the euro will be just another currency to British

travellers making trips to the Continent. If you are tired of fumbling around your wallet or purse for the right colour and size of note, you will probably welcome a universally-recognised euro.

The real advantage of the euro, however, will be to holidaymakers — such as student inter-railers — and business travellers who spend much of the year hopping from one country in Euroland to another and dislike ending their tour with pocketfuls of

unusable coins. But, while the euro will eventually replace the national currencies in these countries, the first coins and notes won't be issued for another three years. Travellers wishing to use cash in EMU member countries will still have to change their sterling into the currency of the country they are visiting until 2002.

Therefore the only way to pay in euros will be through travellers' cheques or with debit and credit cards. If you plan to visit more than one EMU country, you might consider taking some euro-denominated travellers' cheques, which are being made available by issuers such as American Express,

Thomas Cook, Visa and Europay from January 1. These will save you dealing with costs as you won't need to exchange money when moving between countries. Visa's cheques, for example, will be in denominations of 20, 50, 100 and 500 euros.

Euro travellers' cheques are expected to become widely used in restaurants and cafes, much in the same way as they are in the United States. But there is still the chance that in order to pay for some goods or services you may have to change your euro travellers' cheques into the local currency.

Paying by card is likelier to be more straightforward and plastic will probably be most travellers' passport to euro

Notebook



PHOTOGRAPH: DON McBIET

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The shipbroker recently issued one of its gloomiest forecasts that the downturn now facing the industry was the most difficult since the mid-1980s — a period which claimed some of the most illustrious names of the maritime world and which forced many major lenders to write off billions of dollars of loans.

Alan Braumer, a former head of shipping at Midland Bank and now a consultant, said: "There are a hell of a lot of problems out there. We will have to wait till the end of the year when banks publish their balance sheets to see the extent of the problems."

Benaud to make his Test match comeback on C4

Chris Barrie

CHANNEL 4 has surprised the television industry by awarding the contract to televise Test match cricket to Sunset and Vine, the programme-making arm of the Television

Octopus spreads at First Direct

services, the banks do not accept advertisements or sponsorship in an effort to provide unbiased advice.

The new information venture also has a wide variety of offerings such as personal computer and mobile phone banking and specialist gift services.

Although the banks deny they are responding to competition from newcomers such as Branson's Virgin group, they are clearly positioning themselves to become the service providers of the new millennium.

Surveys show that, although consumers dislike being tracked, the Internet and virtual banking become more common, the banks expect their websites to be among the most frequently visited. This will encourage other service providers to try to piggyback their successful websites which, in turn, will make them even more appealing.

First Direct spokeswoman said Octopus was already a "phenomenal success" but would develop the capacity to remind subscribers of important dates such as family birthdays, car MOTs or even the start of the racing season. Eventually Octopus will be able to pay for services as it books them.

The contract had been expected to go to TWI, the only other contender on Channel 4's shortlist of two. But Mark Sharman, controller of sport at Channel 4, said Sunset and Vine had won with a combination of new ideas and key personnel. Richie Benaud, assisted by Mark Nicholas, will provide commentary but will have no investment in the company. The duo had stunned broadcasters recently when it stole the right to broadcast international Tests and the NatWest Trophy series from under the noses of senior BBC managers.

The BBC had been broadcasting cricket's most prestigious one-day matches for more than 60 years. In the ensuing furore the chairman of the BBC governors, Sir Christopher Bland, insisted the BBC had to be ready to lose the rights to top sports events if they proved too expensive to retain.

Sunset and Vine's contract from Channel 4 is initially for one year, with the option to extend it for a further three, the lifetime of Channel 4's commitment to broadcast the Tests. Over four years the contract is worth £10 million.

The decision was reached at 5pm on Christmas Eve and Mr Sharman praised the calibre of the Sunset and Vine team and defended them against criticism from TWI.

Television Corporation employs 200 people and runs an outside broadcast unit second in size only to the BBC.

More firms go to the wall

The annual number of company failures has started to rise for the first time since the height of the 1992 recession. Dun & Bradstreet, the business information service, said yesterday that 38,534 businesses collapsed in 1998, compared with 36,968 the previous year and 52,000 in 1992.

Philip Melillo, a D&B analyst, said that 1998 started with high hopes. "During the first quarter, business failure dropped by 12 per cent. However they rose by 17.9 per cent and 18.6 per cent in the third and fourth quarters respectively as compared with a more modest increase of 4 per cent in the second quarter."

He forecast that the trend would continue for the first six months of 1999 until the impact of interest rate reductions to effect.

Matthew Farrow, head of the CBR's small and medium-sized enterprise unit, said: "The overall level of failures is much lower than in 1991 and 1992, which may be because small businesses are less

TONIGHT RATES - BANK CHG.

Australia 2,649	Germany 2,726
Austria 19.08	Greece 457.10
Belgium 56.71	Hong Kong 12.58
Canada 2,526	India 71,216
Cyprus 0.602	Ireland 1,092
Denmark 10.40	Israel 6,992
Finland 8,272	Italy 2,703
France 9,715	Supplied

financially exposed.

This supports the view that, although things may get worse, the downturn will not be as long or deep as last time."

The Dun & Bradstreet figures show that the business failure rate continued to decline in only two regions, the Southeast, where it was down 1.9 per cent, and the South-west, where it fell 2.9 per cent. Hardest hit was the industrial heartland of the East Midlands, where the rate rose by 15.7 per cent.

Co-op ethic pledge

FROM the take of the Co-operative Bank will no longer trade with, or invest in, companies whose core activities are the extraction of fossil fuels and natural resources or the manufacture of unnatural chemicals.

The bank is concerned at the detrimental impact of the activities on global warming, acid rain and deforestation. Its ban on the animal testing of cosmetics is to be extended to household products. Prohibited instruments of torture will now include water cannons and leg irons.

Malaysia 5.37	Singapore 2.78
Mexico 6.09	South Africa 2.45
Netherlands 3.05	Spain 230.85
New Zealand 3.078	Sweden 13.28
Norway 12.40	Switzerland 2.227
Portugal 26.20	Turkey 546.79
South Africa 6.902	USA 1.23
United Kingdom 1.00	United States 1.00

The Guardian Wednesday

1998 — the

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1998 — the defining moments



Rider in the storm... Richard Virenque whose Festina team were at the heart of the Tour de France scandal. ALEXANDER

Plague pulls pedallers from their pedestal

Duncan Mackay reflects on a catalogue of drug scandals

WHEN Ben Johnson was stripped of his Olympic gold medal and sent home in disgrace from Seoul 10 years ago it was supposed to mark the turning-point in the fight against drugs, but sport appears more plagued by them than ever.

Last week's revelation that the Australian Open tennis champion Petr Korda had tested positive for the anabolic steroid nandrolone at Wimbledon last summer was the final twist of a year when incidents of drug misuse were rife.

They ranged from the Tour de France, where several top teams were caught with the endurance-increasing drug erythropoietin (EPO), through the discovery of whiskey in the jar when the Irish swimmer Michelle de Bruin tampered with a drug test, to accusations that the Irish Rugby Union was involved in a cover-up concerning three positive tests for anabolic steroids.

One of the biggest shocks was the news in October that Uta Pippig, the German runner who has won the Boston Marathon three times, had tested positive for the body-building drug testosterone. That in offence for which Johnson was kicked out of athletics for good in 1993. A more contrasting figure to the muscle-bound, yellow-eyed Johnson is hard to imagine that the petite, blonde Pippig.

If Pippig loses her appeal next year it will reinforce the public view that most Olympic athletes use drugs. The situation is now so dire that the International Olympic Committee has called a special conference in Lausanne in February in an attempt to find a way to stamp out the problem.

The Tour de France scandal provided the spur for international officials to step up their campaign. When a rumour spread that customs officers had arrested a masseur from Festina, France's top team, in his car with a huge



Fallen angel... athletics was shocked when the German runner Uta Pippig tested positive for testosterone. MIKE POWELL

amount of EPO, the riders were slow to react, as cycling had always been buzzed with stories of doping.

Before the discovery, revealing a massive drug-dealing network within the bunch, they believed that doping was untouchable and that cycling obeyed its own rules.

Lying had become a way of living in the peloton when some riders publicly denounced doping as a plague recently announced his retirement.

Customs officers were also involved in the year's first big drugs bust when Australian officials found human growth hormone in the bag of a Chinese swimmer en route to the World Championships in Perth.

As usual athletics suffered its fair share of drug problems and the head of the German federation Helmut Die-

American public after testing positive for the anabolic steroid androstenedione, baseball's Mark McGwire was fated as he shattered the record for home runs, hitting 70. Yet he acknowledged that he, too, had used androstenedione — but hardly a word was said because in baseball it is not banned.

These two examples serve to highlight that testing is not carried out uniformly across

If Pippig loses her appeal next year it will serve to reinforce the public perception that most Olympic athletes are using drugs

before returning to their hotel for a dose of EPO.

Festina's Richard Virenque maintained he had never taken drugs and, when told by the prosecutor investigating the case that laboratory tests showed he had, the rider said: "My name has been cleared."

As a result Virenque has been shunned by sponsors and

track-and-field world records at the millennium in a tacit admission that many of the marks are drug-tainted.

The highest-profile athlete to fall from grace was the shot putter Randy Barnes, the Olympic champion and world record holder. But, whereas Barnes was vilified by the

SPORTS NEWS 13

Racing Maguire decides to split with Nicholson

McNamara almost doubled his total of British success as he had started the afternoon on a score of five, with victories on Mr Lurpak, Albrighton, Ardina and Shanshary.

Albrighton, backed from 10-1 down to 4-1, took £24,000 out of the ring in major bets alone when racing to an easy nine-length success in the three-year-old hurdle.

McNamara who had 21 winners to his credit in Ireland where he has also ridden seven point-to-point winners — was seen to great effect on the odds-on Ardina in the Rusty Nail Novice Chase.

An uneasy favourite, drifting from 2-7 to 2-5, the mare made most of the running but was hard pressed for much of the way by Manhattan Rainbow.

However, when Smiddy Lad fell at the 11th and badly hampered Mr Cavallo, McNamara seized the opportunity to step up the tempo on the favourite, who pinched a couple of lengths with a brilliant ride at the next. Although Manhattan Rainbow kept up the chase, Ardina had seven lengths to spare at the line.

Murphy and McNamara had to settle for second spot with Joe Buzz, but the trainer was far from disconsolate, saying: "I had a four-timer about eight years ago at Worcester when I was with Geoff Hubbard. I had a £20 Yankee bet that day which netted me £16,500."

"I've had a Super Yankee this afternoon and unfortunately Joe Buzz just let me down but don't worry, I'm happy enough with the four-timer."

Leading Irish trainer Tommy Stack was yesterday described as "comfortable" in a County Cork hospital after he was admitted in a critical condition at the weekend with a viral infection, thought to be meningitis.

Italy's racing fraternity, dismayed at punters abandoning the turf to take their luck on lottery tickets, have vowed to strike from Friday.

They want the government to give them a break in the betting stakes — the only source of income for an industry supporting 50,000 people.

Stratford Jackpot card with form guide

ROW	COX	TOP FORM
12.50	Perry Park (10)	Goodwin (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)

12.50 RICHMONDS OF OLDURY MAIDEN HURDLE (Div 1)
2m 6f 110yds £2,000 (12 declared)

12.50	Princess (10)	Goodwin (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)

1.20 RICHMONDS OF OLDURY MAIDEN HURDLE (Div 2)
2m 6f 110yds £2,000 (12 declared)

1.20	Princess (10)	Goodwin (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)

1.50 HARTLEY PENSIONS NOVICE CHASE
2m 5f 110yds £2,224 (7 declared)

1.50	Princess (10)	Goodwin (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)

2.20 TAXIS SELLING HANDICAP HURDLE
2m 110yds £1,772 (15 declared)

2.20	Princess (10)	Goodwin (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)

Lingfield (A.W.)

ROW	COX	TOP FORM
12.40	Princess (10)	Goodwin (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)

12.40 MANNY BERNSTEIN BOOKMAKERS HANDICAP (Div 1)
2m 110yds £2,085 (12 declared)

12.40	Princess (10)	Goodwin (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)

1.10 MANNY BERNSTEIN EARLY PRICE MAIDEN STAKES 2YO
1m 2f 58yds (6 declared)

1.10	Princess (10)	Goodwin (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)

1.40 MANNY BERNSTEIN FREEPHONE 0800 821 821 HANDICAP 2YO
1m 2f 58yds (12 declared)

1.40	Princess (10)	Goodwin (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)

2.10 MANNY BERNSTEIN BOOKMAKERS MAIDEN STAKES 3YO
1m 2f 58yds (6 declared)

2.10	Princess (10)	Goodwin (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)

Results

THE skilful handling of Neely An Eye by his trainer Paul Nicholson was rewarded for the sixth successive time at Haydock yesterday.

All of the seven-year-old's victories have been gained in small fields and he proved too good for his two rivals in the Haydock Park Sponsorship Club Handicap Chase.

HAYDOCK

12.50	Princess (10)	Goodwin (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)

TAUNTON

1.20	Princess (10)	Goodwin (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.20	Princess (10)	Princess (10)

LINGFIELD

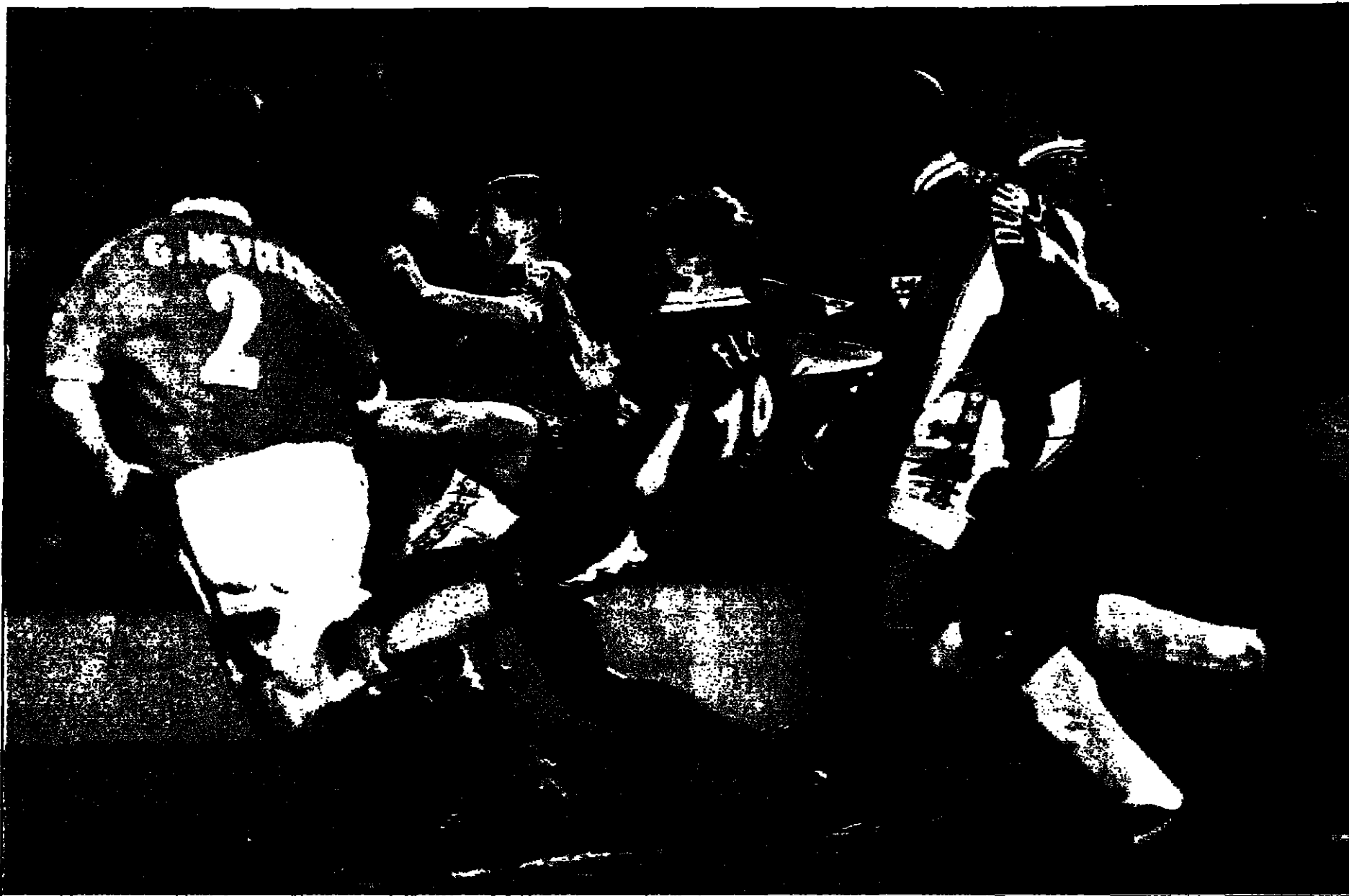
1.10	Princess (10)	Goodwin (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)
1.10	Princess (10)	Princess (10)

KEEPING TRACK

09064 700 +	COMMENTARY RESULTS
STRATFORD	141 151
LINGFIELD	143 153
ALL COURSES COMMENTARY	09064 700 140
ALL COURSES RESULTS	09064 700 150

SportsGuardian

Premiership



Missing out... a lunging Tore Andre Flo sends another shot wide in the first half as Manchester United's defenders converge on the Chelsea striker

PHOTOGRAPH BY DYLAN MARTINEZ

Chelsea 0 Manchester United 0

Flo fluffs leading lines

David Lacey

CHELSEA missed chance after a decisive lead against Manchester United and head the Premiership with Tore Andre Flo the principal culprit. The lanky Norwegian sprayed a header and several shots all around the target as Alex Ferguson's players struggled to get their game together.

Although Chelsea enjoyed the better of the 1-1 draw at Old Trafford a fortnight earlier, United arrived at Stamford Bridge hardly weighed down by pessimism. They had lost only once in seven league visits, and memories of last season's 5-3 FA Cup win at Chelsea were still fresh.

Yet clearly all was not well

with a United side still deprived of Dwight Yorke's profound presence, through an abdominal injury, and struggling to find form. Last night they looked to Ryan Giggs and Paul Scholes to provide the linkage with Andy Cole.

The ease with which Roberto Di Matteo's pass split the United defence in the opening seconds did Chelsea's confidence no harm, even if Gianfranco Zola scored the chance with a shot over the bar.

United again showed a tendency to defend too deep, a dangerous business with Zola in such good form. The presence of Tore Andre Flo in the Chelsea attack at the start also suggested Gianluca Vialli had remembered United's recent vulnerability in the air.

In fact Chelsea might have gone ahead in the 12th minute when Flo rose at the far post to

meet Zola's corner with a firm downward header but the ball sailed just wide. And when in the next instant Di Matteo appeared, between United's centre-backs to volley a shot over, United's hopes of a clean sheet appeared even slimmer.

The longer the game went on the more ragged United's passing became

Certainly Flo should have scored after 19 minutes. Zola's pass released Dan Petrescu on the right, the Romanian's low centre found the defence in a tangle and Flo managed to control the ball. Chelsea would surely have gone ahead.

Two minutes later Celestine Babayaro sent Zola on a run at a retreating defence,

Jaap Stam was beaten by an Italian shimmy, Peter Schmeichel could only parry the shot and Flo put the rebound wide. At that point all United had achieved was a misfired free-kick by David Beckham, yet they could have

scored in their next attack. Chelsea were caught square as Scholes found Cole to his right, and Cole's run took him clear of Ed De Goey's challenge but by the time he shot from a narrow angle Frank Leboeuf was well placed to clear.

Flo continued to suffer near-misses. Zola put him through shortly before the half-hour

but again the Norwegian was off target. As he waited yet another opportunity over, United might have begun to suspect that the evening could yet be theirs.

If so, Zola was given a wonderful chance to dislodge them of the notion by Roy Keane's aberrant pass across the face of his own area six minutes before half-time. Only Schmeichel barred the way but Zola's first touch for once let him down, allowing Schmeichel to smother the shot when it came.

United's passing became ragged. Even the simple balls were going astray and neither Giggs nor Beckham was more than a peripheral influence.

Yet Chelsea's failure to turn their superiority into goals had left the match evenly balanced. Stam and Keane, moreover, were holding United

together as Zola continued to nag away.

When United's attacks achieved some co-ordination they often foundered on the burly Michael Duberry, whose duel with Cole provided an intriguing subplot. But after an hour the match had become less than intriguing and at least United's introduction of Teddy Sheringham, for Scholes, gave it a welcome twist.

Sheringham had played a major role in the outstanding Cup victory at Chelsea. Almost as soon as he appeared United's movements acquired better sense of direction.

Chelsea (4-4-2): De Goey; Ferrer, Duberry, Leboeuf, La Sasa (Goldbeck, 80min); Petrescu, Di Matteo, Morris (Dennis, 73), Babayaro; Flo, Zola. **Manchester United (4-4-2):** Schmeichel; G. Neville, Stam, Scholes, Irwin; Beckham, Keane, Butt, Giggs; Cole, Scholes (Shearer, 80). **Referee:** M. Riley (Leeds).

The night that Frog turned into a prince



Paul Weaver

FOR those of us not in Australia the news of the Ashes series has arrived in our homes as a sort of referred pain, half a globe away from its source but still a throbbing agony that can leave the features pale and pinched.

So we should enjoy the analogue of yesterday's famous victory at the MCG in the latest clash of Poms and Cobbers, at least as much as anyone suffering from Sky-lag and scarier peepers can enjoy anything.

How was it for you? I missed it. If you share my hours you were dragged sleepily to bed by the grey fingers of dawn, with England heading towards another humiliating defeat inside three days' play. A few minutes later, or so it seemed, you dashed downstairs and switched on the cathode tube just in time to see Darren Gough's stumping celebration.

In between there were some droning voices on Radio 4. In desperate hours such as these the radio is approached with the wary fingers of a bomb disposal unit. Remember those pre-dawn, elderdown days when a frosty finger would tune in to Lily's morning winning the Ashes, almost 30 years ago? Three years earlier it was Alan Knott and Jeff Jones saving a Test match in the Caribbean. The only problem was that in the morning you were never sure whether it had all been a wonderful dream.

Dean Headley is probably pinching himself too. A couple of years ago there were a few worries about the player nicknamed Frog because of his wide grin. Even before he played for England he flexed himself up with an agent, bought expensive suits and even cat-walked for a Manchester-based modelling agency. Some Kent colleagues were worried that, when Min Patel and Mark Falham returned to Canterbury from England duty, Deano would show a keen curiosity as to how much money they had earned.

Today, more mature as both cricketer and man, he is one of the most popular members of the dressing-room and his new-found confidence makes

him a non-stop contributor to team meetings. With the help of the England bowling coach Bob Cotton he has also sorted out his no-ball problem. Now, before he bowls, he will measure out his run-up with a tape and use spray paint to draw a spallay line, beside which he will write "Frog" so that he will not confuse his mark with another bowler's.

But this morning we should also include Graeme Hick in our reverent embraces. Yesterday, while Charles Colville instigated Headley, Alex Stewart, Mark Ramprakash, Darren Gough, David Lloyd and even Lord MacLaurin—who will probably give the entire team his fit before the Sydney Test—Hick was nowhere to be seen.

Yet it was his top-scoring 60 which gave England's bowlers a chance. Why do so many people have difficulty taking Hick to their hearts? Mistakenly he was not a member of the original tour party, despite an average of 42 against Australia. Now, twice in his three matches in this series, he has given their bowlers a man-sized hammering.

This is the man who, at 32, has made 104 first-class centuries and could probably beat Jack Hobbs's record of 197 if he wanted to. He still cannot win, though. In the early edition of yesterday's Evening Standard, before England's victory, there was the headline: "Hick's slip miss lets Aussies off hook again", referring to his early-morning dropping of Justin Langer.

He is not English, of course. Then there is his introverted nature and an old vulnerability to pace that suggested a temperamental frailty. Most of all, some people will never forgive him for not being the Bradmanesque phenomenon he suggested he could be before he entered international cricket in 1991. Now he deserves a decent run in the side.

I AM almost worried that England could win in Sydney and level the series. This, after all, is the country that prefers to represent Dunkirk as a famous victory.

A 2-3 score might tempt some people to forget how bloody awful England were early in the series, when it really mattered, after more bloody awful stuff in the Caribbean. These people pointed to the false dawn of England's rather lucky win over a better-drilled South Africa side in the summer.

Today, though, let us crack open a tinny of the amber nectar and toast the magnificent Poms.

Rangers' concern as Advocaat suggests he will leave Ibrox in 18 months' time

Patrick Glenn

DICK ADVOCAT, the Rangers coach, gave a strong hint yesterday that he is unlikely to remain at Ibrox beyond the expiry of his contract in 18 months.

The Dutchman, who suc-

ceeded Walter Smith only last summer, had been reportedly on the verge of agreeing an extension to his current deal with the Rangers chairman David Murray. But, having told the Dutch press that this was not true, he confirmed to the Scottish media his

probable departure in 2000. "This is a very demanding job and a very important one," said Advocaat, "and it can't be done fully in one or two years. But the most important thing is we are building a new team and it may be completed by me or somebody else but the

framework must be there. "When I arrived, there was no frame. But, if I work for two years, the man who comes in after me will have a good team. I will definitely stay for that time [the outstanding 18 months]. I'll speak to the chairman at a meeting next

month to discuss the future of the club. But it could be next December before I discuss extending my stay."

Advocaat has taken Rangers to a significant lead in the Premier League and they can go further ahead tonight with their game at Dundee United.

Headley and Gough pull series back to 2-1 as England at last find the catchword

Mike Selvey

IN a series in which hamfisted fielding has been more costly to England than inadequate batting or charitable bowling, there was irony in Mark Ramprakash — England's batsman of the series but as guilty as anyone of missing chances — providing the catalyst for a wonderful 12-run win in Melbourne yesterday with a catch from the top drawer of Test history.

It was unforgettable. Justin Langer, Ramprakash's Middlesex team-mate last season,

was constructing a partnership with Mark Waugh that threatened to take his side, set 175 on the fourth day of the fourth Test, to a victory that would give them an unsalable 2-0 lead in the series, thus rendering irrelevant the final Test in Sydney which begins on Saturday. Having survived a chance to slip when one, Langer, on 30 now, rocked back and hooked a short delivery from Alan Mulhally with great power towards square leg, where Ramprakash was endeavouring to prevent the quick singles that are a feature of

Australian batting. The ball was in the air but had been hit downwards and several feet to Ramprakash's right. The fielder saw the ball late, flung himself horizontally and somehow clung on. Langer was flabbergasted. Ramprakash was overdosing on adrenaline.

The catch, Australia's captain Mark Taylor admitted, turned the game. It inspired Dean Headley to a burst that was to bring him career-best Test figures of six for 60, including four for four in 14 balls. Australia were all out for 162 shortly after 7.30pm on



Hats off... Ramprakash, Stewart and Headley celebrate

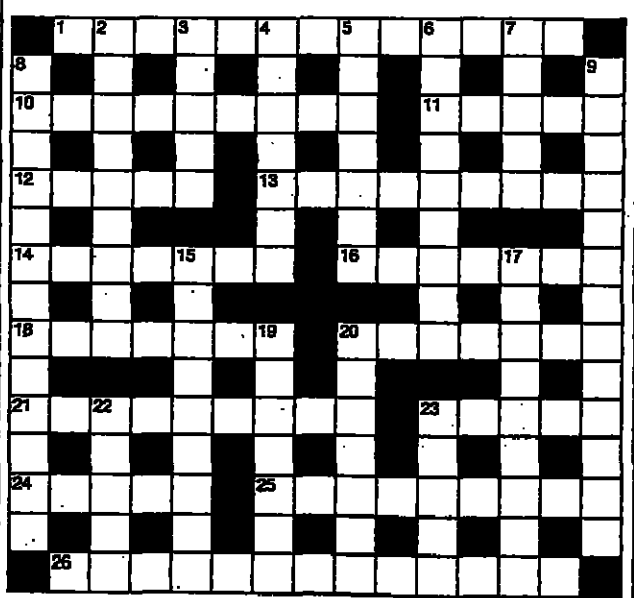
a day which had begun more than nine hours earlier. Taylor confessed that his side had become complacent.

"Our whole attitude was bad," he said. "We got lazy."

Report, Paul Abbott, page 14

Guardian Crossword No 21,469

Set by Bunthorne



Across

- 1 Electrode modulation absorbing hushed and cacophonous sound phenomenon (7,6)
- 10 Lines conducting creation of matter is a fluke (5)
- 11 Lightweight livestock transport for plateau and mountains (5)
- 12 Welshman left holding Welshwoman (5)
- 13 All's pin-sharp from this closeness, as it were (4,5)
- 14 Force the French corporal East to a Caledonian shambles (7)
- 16 Gentleman's preference left to Richard's rescuer (7)
- 18 Heads off transporter (7)
- 20 Polish 'oop of sanctity in NY (7)
- 21 Mmi Dreamtime (5)

Down

- 2 Humble tree topped by superior onle begotter (5)
- 3 Evident location of Sodom and Gomorrah (5)
- 4 Articulate "Measure for Measure" (7)
- 5 Ella's little sister? (3-4)
- 6 User-friendly and impervious to Feste? (5)
- 7 Raccoon-like creature of the first layer (5)
- 8 This mighty corporation is not for turning (5,7)
- 9 T'fillets of hake one left out to supply a picnic! (1,5,2,4)
- 15 R&D computer, miles out, crashed with bug in the system (5)
- 17 It's always the same! A French Bible enlisting our aid (2,1,5)
- 18 A pain in the rear? You need some lead in your pencil (7)
- 20 Doctor of music with time to drink vino? On the contrary! (7)
- 22 Sheak dead relative (5)
- 23 Keen on training for the veal? (5)

Solution tomorrow

If stuck? Then call our solutions line on 0800 338 338. Calls cost 50p per minute at all times. Service supplied by RTS.



Michael Winner was unsurprised by the emergence of a new Public Enemy Number One, noting that "even his name, Osama bin Laden, conjures up the image of a ruthlessly evil man". If Winner believes names reflect their owner, shouldn't he change his name to Michael Loser?
The Francis Wheen quiz, designed to minimise stress by requiring no answers

G2 page 5

